ATHENA 1998

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Editorial

So here we are again with the 1998 edition of Athena, choc-a-block full of interesting articles, amazing fiction and fabulous graphics. There are tidbits to learn, ideas to chew on, information to digest and stories to wet your appetite. Whatever else it means to you, *Athena* is a feast of wimmin's work, a smorgasborg of our sisters' experiences - something you can really get your teeth into.

The main theme of this *Athena '98* is body image. With so much emphasis in our society on the "physical', on the 'beautiful', wimmin are still governed by what others think of us. What we put into our mouths, what we clothe our bodies in, what shape, size, age, colour, height, proportions, whatever - we are not free to choose without a constant and difficult struggle to be who we want to be. Alhough of course, these issues do not only relate to wimmin, nor does each womyn think she is personally affected. But what does affect all of us is that as wimmin we are increasingly making our own decisions about our lives, taking greater control and reshaping our work and family lives. But as we are increasing our autonomy as a group, we are being bombarded with false images of what we should be, stripped of our dignity and confidence, thrown onto the social/media chopping board to be trimmed, reshaped and wrapped in marketable packaging, but feeling all empty and lost inside.

It is important that women in regional areas, such as Western Sydney, have the opportunity to publish their material. *Athena* also acts as means for local women to keep up on national issues affecting women.

This year, *Athena* will be launched at the Network of Women Students in Australia (NOWSA) annual conference being held here, at Nepean. In its ten year herstory, Nepean is the first regional university to host NOWSA.

Finially, at the 11th hour, with *the* deadline rapidly approaching....we hope you enjoy the '98 edition and find an article or two that takes your fancy! From alternative treatments for eating disorders to the West Review, from abortion to horoscopes, this issue promises to be diverse! A big thanx to all contributors and support networks in the wings. Happy NOWSA!

Yours in sisterhood,

KATERINA ROBIN ANNIE SUSAN KERRY

Editors: Katerina Tahija & Robin Hooper

Layout: Robin Hooper

Thanks to: Susan Page, Annie Connellan, Kerry Swift (the NOWSA A Team), Michael Mc Gettigan & Mickey G (for emergency help line serivces), Madeline Tahija (for patience), Silvana Giordano (for her sketch book) & Barbie (for inspiration)...a special thanx to Katerina for making sure Robin ate during production! Pelase refer to p. 44 for artists credits

The views expressed in this publication do not neccessarily represent the views of the University of Western Sydney,Nepean Students' Union or Womens Collective

NOT Body

With every advert scrutinised, images analysed, pictures labelled sexist and the feminist media police on patrol, haven't we had enough hype about body image? Haven't women's bodies been done to death? Shouldn't we leave the media alone and just get on living our lives as women? Well, when women at Nepean were asked about their bodies, what they would change and what they liked, this is what they said……

"It's ok . It could be better. I would like to have long legs. (Looooong pause when asked about what she liked). Haven't really thought about it, but I like to flaunt it." (35 yrs old)

"I think my body's fair. Legs could be better as they are full of scars.Everyone looks at the outer layer. I wish I were taller, about 185cm. My cousin is a model and has what I call ideal looks. She is tall and gorgeous. I like my tattoos and naval ring." (26 yrs old)

(Laughs)" I'm FAT ! Wish I were slimmer. Actually, as you grow older you don't worry as much until someone tells you or you see media stuff. But it's also the way you think about yourself. Sometimes people cannot accept their bodies but you have to. Some are obsessed about maintaining body image. I would like a smaller tummy and thinner legs. Not really (like anything about myself), I would if I was slimmer. If I was thinner, for my health that is." (50 yrs old)

(Long pause) "Hard to think that any women wouldn't want to change something. I am quite body conscious, though I wish I wasn't. I think about everything before I put it into my mouth – big on calorie counting. I would eat a bucket of chips, but if I do then no more fat for the day. It's not to starve, but about being very conscious of food. I would like to be better at toning my body as it takes such discipline and dedication. What do I like about myself? (rolling of eyes) I like that I have great control over my weight." (20 yrs old)

"I'm happy. I wouldn't change anything at all. Well some things. I have a great awareness of the media so those images don't bother me anymore. I like my eyebrows (my whole body is alright)." (25 yrs)

"I'm pleased with my body. I would change my eating habits to be healthier but not for appearances. I like my hands and being small (cause it's funny)" (19 yrs old)

"Not willing to be nude for my art yet. I tend to like my body when others do. I can't rely on my self-body love; I have a real insecurity about my body. I have two views about my body. I wouldn't change anything at all or I would change everything." (19 yrs old)

"Um, not happy about it. All of it , I'm just not happy (with my body). Especially my weight. It's hard to do anything about it. I have tried at least 5 different weight loss places. I have definitely bad self body image. It makes it hard to do things; social situations can be difficult. It's a non-ending cycle. If you can't be comfortable with yourself how can you be comfortable with others. I would like my shape if I were thinner. I do like my eyes though." (19 yrs old)

(could not stop laughing) "South bound. That's it!!!! (35 yrs old)

"Happy with my body, always have been. Except I did go to a weight loss centre and lost 15 kilos, but for health reasons. I am in theatre, so I am always on view. I would change my chicken loaf white skin. And my cellulite. And my upper arms. I like that my body is proportional- I like that my body is hourglass shaped." (19 yrs old)

"I'm not complaining. I've been lucky being tall, you know, easy distribution. No matter what you look like, thighs get you everytime. Mine are due to a chocolate addiction. I would like to be more toned but I am too lazy. I like my back and my neck. I also like that I have small boobs as I am sporty and they would have got in the way. (21 yrs old)

"Um. A lot. I would like to change a lot of it. I get a lot of slack about my body from everyone. Especially about my boobs and thighs. I'm always told I have a voluptuous body. I get a lot of slack from my family. I would prefer to be thinner. I would like smaller boobs and thighs. Um, I probably like my neck and waist. I like necks." (17 yrs old)

"My body. Well, getting naked for my art is something to help my self-image and it would be liberating and help in creating self-esteem and confidence. I'm pretty happy with myself but I'm not perfect but perfect is not the way to go. People need to accept you for your own person; if they can't accept me

then I don't want to know them. I wouldn't change anything. I like my lips." (19 yrs old)

"I like my body because I like me. Inside is more important than outside. I am just me. You need to feel good about yourself to feel good about anything. I would change my hands because they have arthritis. I wouldn't change anything else. I have always thought you need to take me for who I am. I don't particularly like one part. It's all me." (37 yrs)

"Never really thought about it. I am 23 now, so I suppose a few years ago I was worried about my body. Growing up you want to be a model but now I don't care. I'm glad I have reached acceptance now and not have to face that later. No! I would not change anything. Nothing stands out particularly that I like. I'm just content," (23 yrs old)

"There are things I would like to work at, but generally I'm confident. My faults only affect me not anyone else. I'm not really happy with my body but overall physically it's ok. This just happens to be a year when I am not particularly healthy. I can't really think of anything I would change maybe my teeth. It's important to use what you've got and be happy. I like my femininity, characterised by my long hair and things like that. You know, we're all different for a reason." (24 yrs old)

"I would like to lose weight and be more in shape. I'm not happy, especially about my weight. I would change my appearance, everything. I don't really like anything much about myself." (29 yrs old)

"I am one of those painful people who likes my body. Weight doesn't bother me. I have been a size 12 and felt healthy, but I have also been a size 8 and muscley. I like to be fit and eat well, except I smoke. It's a health issue, you need enough body fat as a woman. Of course I liked when I was a size 8 but I am happy. I think I am fatter than what other people see me. Especially when I have PMT and feel all bloated, I feel really fat. I would like to be taller. I really like my tits. I like my body when I have been working out . I suppose I wouldn't mind being more voluptuous. I didn't really like my body for years, especially feeling fat." (36 yrs old)

"Um, I don't like it. I am too tall, too skinny and I've got no boobs, especially after breastfeeding 3 kids, and you could drive a truck through the gap in my legs. I would like to have voluptuous breasts. I would like to have pretty facial features. I suppose I like that I am skinny so I don't have to worry about dieting. And that I can wear a lot of clothes." (30ish)

"I think it's pretty good, especially after having 6 kids. Lots of exercise walking to and from uni has helped me lose weight. I like my legs. I don't like my teeth but I can't afford to fix them." (51 yrs old)

"I think it's ok. I feel sad when I walk through the plaza and see all the skinny girls who spend all their money on clothes, make-up and hair, and all of them look somewhat emaciated. I probably wouldn't change anything. If you changed one thing you would find something else to change. I don't like anything in particular. I'm happy and it seems to work well." (29 yrs old)

It seems that quite often the comments we make about ourselves and what we think of our bodies depends on how others respond to us and how we compare to our ideal image. Whether it's longer legs, bigger or smaller boobs, thinner legs, smaller bodies, more tone, more muscle, we can't accept ourselves for who we are. Those of us who can accept our bodies have struggled to get there.

There is nothing wrong with appreciating beauty, bodies & wanting to look good. It's when we, as women, start to live our lives based on what society dictates - in terms of our appearance, diet, behaviour- that's when we stop being ourselves. Interestingly enough, most women I spoke to for this story, responsed immediately with desciptions of what they disliked about their body, few could tell me what they liked without some prolonged thought. A lot of our concepts of body image comes from what others in our society think. So that's why *'Athena'* this year is exploring bodies and their images.

Katerina Tahija

Between 1989 - 1991 1600 females were hospitalised in NSW with eating disorders. The average age of females with anorexia nervosa was 16.The average age for bulimia nervosa was 22. **(Source: Centre of Dieting Disorders, Department of Psychiatry, Uni of Sydney)**

AGAIN

Athena 1998

EATING AS A THERAPUTIC ADDICTION

- OR MY BATTLE WITH AN EATING DISORDER !!!

Maybe I should change my story so that it conformed to the media's usual depiction of an anorexic and bulimic. Maybe, I could arrange for this story to feature an "after anorexia" photo, showing me looking beautiful, glamourous and, of course, still skinny. I could be a model or a socialite, 177 centimetres tall and a "healthy" 55 kgs. I would have attended a most prestigious private school where I was just too popular for words. And, I would declare to the media that the pressure of this popularity was the basis of my eating disorder; the pressure of being "Miss Perfection Princess"; the pressure of being just so damn upper class and beautiful. My laxative addiction would become a "prescription drug addiction" and my decaying teeth would have to be replaced with new ones. And finally, the battle with my eating disorder would come to a wonderful happy ending - in the luxury of a private hospital (Daddy paid), with a rich Prince Charming and a BMW by my side.

My story isn't wonderful and happy and definitely doesn't end with a BMW. This article would never reach the tabloids because the reality is that everyday I wake up to discover that I am still 160 centimetres tall, still 52 kgs and still not beautiful. And, still not rich and thin.

I suffered from both bulimia and anorexia for 10 years and I consider that my years from 17 to 27 were wasted in a vile, anti-social and stupid obsession. I don't really know why I became a bulimic at 17 as I certainly have never fitted into the "perfect little girl" syndrome attributed to most eating addictions. I do know that I used an eating disorder in the same way addicts use alcohol and drugs; to hide the pain of not fitting in and not having "conventional" looks, as a way of dealing with my "eccentric" behaviour, my irrational fears and anxieties, my non-conformity. I could never accept how I was as a person - I would blame myself for being highly-strung or acting stupid during the day and come home at night and binge, trying to wallow away in the action of eating food. After a binge, I would have a cleansing ritual involving purging, starvation and exercise. The ritual marked a start of a new day when I would be a nicer, more likable person.

I hid my eating disorder for 10 years, from parents, doctors and acquaintances. The effects of the disorder would reveal themselves in poor HSC results, my inability to develop friendships, my fear of any social interaction or discourse, my reluctance to leave the safety of my parent's home. The cycle of bingeing and purging became a daily routine, just something I had to do despite the consequences. The thought of suicide was regularly with me and I remember the times when I would lie on my bedroom floor, sobbing uncontrollably after a binge, just wishing that death would end my addiction. I just hated everything about myself and bingeing was a way of dealing with, and eventually manifesting this hate. Taking laxatives became a necessary addiction and my weekends became a social event with a toilet bowl. I knew that I was screwed up but I never did anything about it. I just continued hating the world and myself.

If bulimia was my way of coping with my life, anorexia was the way of controlling my life. Anorexia coincided with my achievements in tertiary study at the age of 23. For three blissful years, I fanatically controlled my eating to the point that I weighed only 42kgs. I was still using laxatives, not to binge, but to rid my body of excess fat. I really liked myself during those three years because I was thin. I actually felt beautiful because I could wear anything and because men actually noticed me. I had managed to exert self-control over my life and over my eating. My disorder now became a "body image" thing and the thinner I got, the more I liked myself. I ignored the dangers of my condition - the fainting, potassium loss, the loss of my mensturation. At one point, my doctor sent me to a psychiatrist who did not deal with eating disorders and considered that I was just slightly depressed and anxious. I would sit in the waiting room, with the other ordinary women facing alcohol addiction and post-divorce depression, and wondering why we were really there.

The bulimia raised its ugly head yet again when I was 26 and trying to cope with a relationship. I could not believe that a man would actually want to love somebody as horrible as me. I hid my eating disorder for as long as I could then I purposely set out to destroy the relationship with my bingeing and purging. And, then one day, the bulimia stopped. It stopped because I was scared of losing my lover. And it stopped because of vanity and because I was scared of dying.

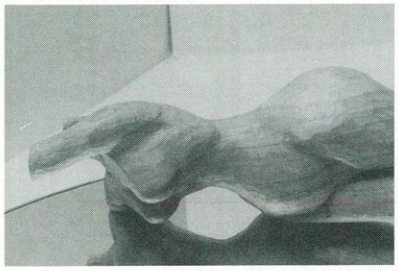
I regret having suffered from an eating disorder for so long. I regret not reaching out for help and not being hospitalised. But I probably would have been ostracised as mental illness has a stigma attached. I regret the toll that bulimia and anorexia have taken on my body - the loss of bone density, the dry skin, and the screwed up digestive system. Although an eating disorder is no longer part of my life, my regrets still remain. At the age of 33, I am only now coming to terms with the person I am. I have thrown out all my self-improvement books and am trying to be content with my "highly strung, eccentric personality" and my less than fashionable looks and body. But I still wish I would wake up rich and thin.

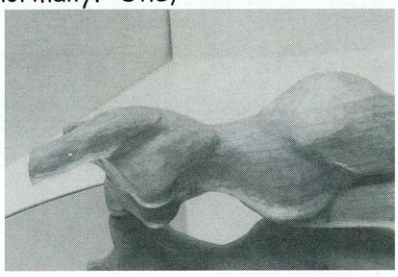
Beyond Anorexia

By Catherine Garrett

Catherine is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Social Community and Organisational Studies at UWS Nepean. Her book "Beyond Anorexia: Narrative, Spirituality and Recovery", will reach Australian bookshops in August. This article includes an extract from her book.

It happened again this semester, as it always does. One by one, several of the most intelligent and attractive students in the subjects I teach came to talk to me about their eating problems. Two had begun restricting their meals during Lent, as a Christian religious gesture, and now feel 'impure' and guilty if they eat normally. One, a Muslim, had never been dissatisfied with her appearance until she came to Australia. Here, she has learned to dislike her own body and fear her traditional cuisine, even though she knows that back in her country, only large women are taken seriously: to be small is to be poor and powerless. Another, also a recent migrant, guiltily eats for comfort, then makes herself vomit because she is trying to cope with a new marriage, job and study, and simultaneously meet the ideals of 'healthy eating' and unrealistic slenderness that confront her in a new culture. A Chinese student wrote in his essay about the change in his mother since her arrival in this country. She has taken seriously the messages of the media, joined Weight Watchers and now maintains her weight loss; but when her family sits down to her favourite foods, she leaves the table in tears. She wishes she had never heard of dieting. Students already very fit from playing sport monitor their diet and assess their weight as if their moral worth depended on it. None of these people has what a psychiatrist would call an 'eating disorder', but all of them are suffering unnecessarily.

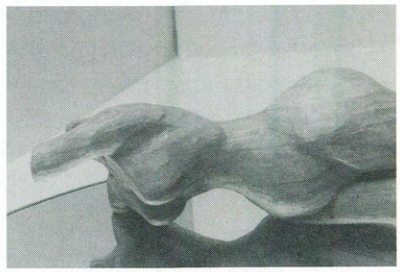




The way these students feel about their bodies can't be separated from how they feel about themselves and especially from the judgements they make about whether they are 'good' or 'bad' people. This is what they, and millions of others like them, have in common with those who are officially labelled 'anorexic', 'bulimic' or 'compulsive eaters'. It seems to me that the more we can understand about how people recover from these eating disorders, the more hope we all have of changing the way we feel about our embodied selves (after all, for all practical purposes, we ARE our bodies). The rest of this article is taken from the conclusions I've reached in my book Beyond Anorexia. The book is about how people recover and it is based on my own experience of anorexia and recovery and on the words of over thirty people who told me their recovery stories.

The most frequent question people ask about my work is, of course; 'how do people recover?' (often preceded by 'do they recover?). So, I'm providing a summary, in story form, of what I have learned in the course of my research. A great deal of it is relevant , not only to people trying (or helping someone) to recover from an eating disorder, but also to anyone who is obsessed with the size or shape of their body - and right now, that includes well over half Australia's female population.

Most stories we hear about eating disorders (in the media, anecdotally and from doctors and psychiatrists) are about 'anorexia nervosa' (as if it were more serious or more common than bulimia or compulsive eating, and as if the same person could not experience several of these difficulties). People usually speak of anorexia as an illness in search of a cure. Even books about recovery devote most of their length to descriptions of symptoms and possible causes; biological, psychological and social. Although these books use the words of 'anorectics' themselves, they select those that deal with the horror of the experience in preference to those which tell of the rewards of recovery. In my study, I asked people not to tell me about how they became anorexic or what it was like, but about the changes which took place as they stopped 'being anorexic'. The usual story about anorexia is that all women are potential victims of media pressure to be thin. Even sociologists and feminist theorists blame social forces of various kinds for the way women starve themselves or binge and purge. No one seems to ask how the same people manage to escape from this 'oppression'; to find pleasure in



in contrast with their anorexic period. If we heard more stories of recovery, perhaps more people would recover, and perhaps fewer might become anorexic in the first place.

I found, when people told me their recovery stories, that the more they felt they had recovered, the more coherent were their stories; that it is through the creation of these stories, whether or not they are entirely historically accurate, that they also create their own recovery. All these narratives seemed to include the same 'myths'; they were like the age-old stories of death, birth and resurrection told in many different cultures. They always involved some kind of descent into an 'underworld' of chaos and suffering, then a return to a fuller life, almost as a new person.

When I asked myself and thirty-three other people at various stages of recovery (but mostly recovered) what they thought recovery meant, they mentioned several elements they believed to be essential. 'Feeling normal' was one; and this did not necessarily mean looking and eating like everyone else around them, but feeling as if they had found a way of eating and living which was comfortable for them in a quite different way from their earlier anorexic lifestyle. Losing their obsession with food was another. Believing that they were worthwhile people and that their lives had meaning was another change which they all associated with their recovery in contrast with the period of their 'anorexia'. Enjoying and no longer being afraid of social situations was yet another. For some, recovery seemed to be faster than for others, but they all spoke of it as an ongoing process, rather than a sudden change; most of them felt that it was a kind of knowledge and that learning about it never stops; often the same issues would come up again at different points in their lives and they would solve new parts of the old puzzle.

When they spoke about the stages and turning points in their recovery, they described changes in their perceptions of space and time. They began to feel part of the natural world and part of the society in which they live; they began to feel 'connected' again. Some of them (but by no means all) had had psychotherapy or other forms of treatment. Many felt that treatment had not helped them at all, but when it had, it was always because a strong relationship had been established with a therapist (or a nurse, another 'patient', a dietician, a friend or a lover); a relationship in which the many aspects of themselves apart from their anorexic behaviour were acknowledged and nurtured. This person also provided a model for a non-anorexic way of life. Often, travel allowed them to explore reality beyond the boundaries of their known selves. They also mentioned creativity; their involvement in music, art, writing and gardening as parts of their recovery. The most important element of recovery was their conviction that, unlike recovered addicts or alcoholics, once recovered they would never be tempted to do it again. At the same time, they all said they had learned something very worthwhile from the experience. What was it?

Most of them said that their anorexia had been a kind of search and a way of testing themselves and their limits. Several said it was a spiritual quest, and certainly a quest for meaning. What they found was something they felt they had already experienced much earlier; a sense of being at peace with themselves and at one with nature and with other people. One of the powerful 'myths' which has helped them recover has been this story of a lost and found inner unity and communion with the outer world. Their descriptions of recovery were just like descriptions of a religious conversion experience, with the same accompanying joy, peace and certainty, following a period of despair and suffering. Like conversion experiences, they usually included a belief in some force beyond themselves and of its active participation in their recovery.

"Most of them said that their anorexia had been a kind of search and a way of testing themselves and their limits. Several said it was a spiritual quest, and certainly a quest for meaning."

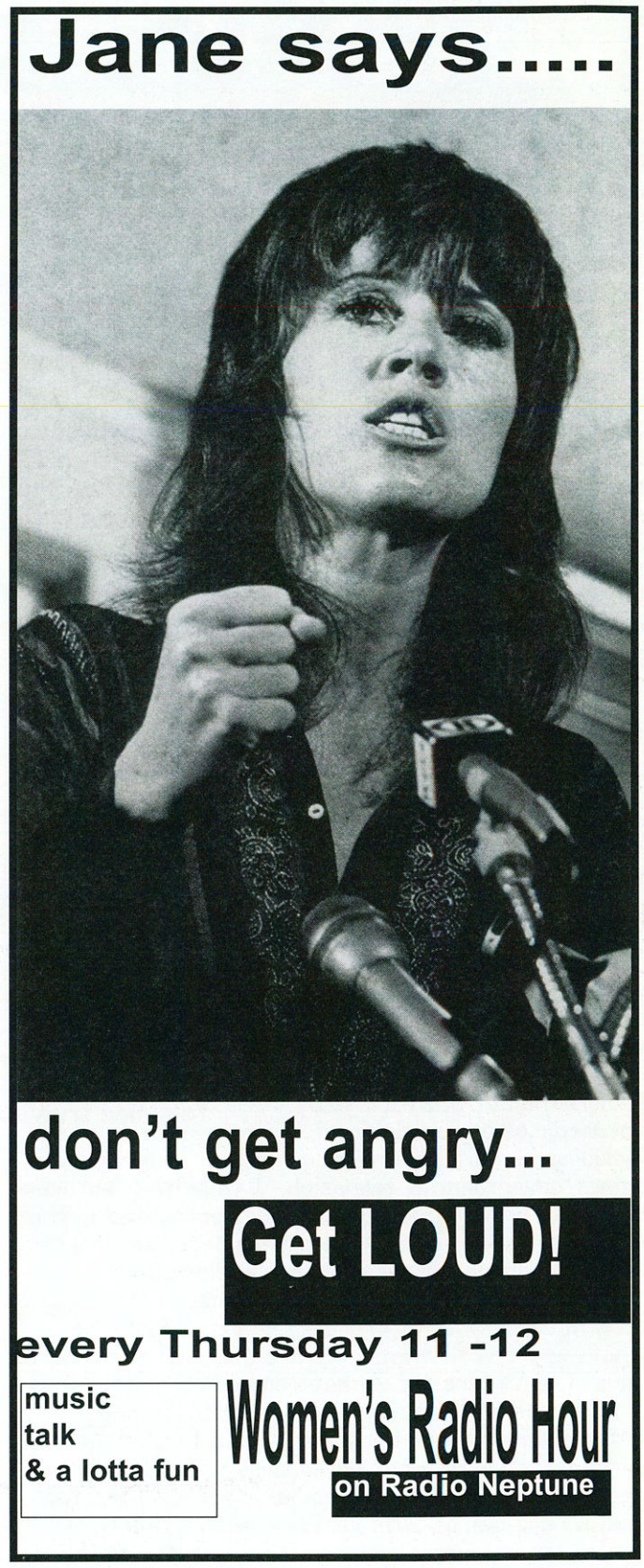
One of the questions often asked about anorexia is: 'if we are all subject to the same cultural forces, why aren't we all anorexic?'. So it is also worth asking: 'if the means of recovery are also available to us, why don't all anorectics recover?' First of all, we are not, of course, all subject to exactly the same social pressures (which is why fewer men than women are anorexic, for instance). Similarly, we are not all equally exposed to the factors that make recovery possible; especially not to recovery stories. But there is another reason why some people and not others become anorexic and why some recover while others do not. It has to do with agency. Not just 'choice', because often people do not consciously 'choose' to recover or not; but agency in the sense of taking certain steps rather than others. So, to recover, you not only need to start telling your life story differently, but at the same time it seems that you must act differently too; plunge into alternative practices to those you followed into anorexia.

The practices that contributed to recovery for the participants in my study I have called rituals because, like the ritualistic behaviour of anorexia, they are performed over and over again and they maintain and deepen recovery just as those of anorexia nervosa sustained and exacerbated suffering. The rituals of recovery are healing rituals and they almost always include, and bring about changes

to, the body. For these people, they included swimming, surfing, bike-riding, yoga, meditation, gardening, singing, playing musical instruments, writing, painting, all kinds of craftwork and cooking. Not that people did not indulge in these activities when they were anorexic, or sometimes before then, but in recovery they took on a quite different meaning . Through these rituals, people expressed and found new parts of themselves, new ways to live and especially the sense of connection I've described; within themselves, with nature and with other people.

Although I never started our conversations with any mention of 'spirituality', this is the term I have used to describe what participants found, because it is the word the majority used themselves. Even when they did not, most accepted it as one way of speaking about their experience. The reason they have been able to find the words and the practices that led them to recovery is that they have read and heard about them, sometimes almost by accident and often through popular psychology or New Age therapies. Sometimes their sources were more 'intellectualized'; they studied the work of Carl Jung or delved into the many 'alternative' practices arising from the teachings and experiments of Whilhelm Reich (Bioenergetics, Biodynamics, Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais, Rolfing, Rebirthing and so on). Often they were pursuing an interest in Eastern philosophy and religion and its accompanying practices like Yoga and Tai-Chi. Some were Christians, Jews and Buddhists and others were humanists. All of them, however, had found myths (or sacred stories) that gave meaning to their lives, and activities that continued to transform them.

When I tell people this story, they often ask 'but how different is all that from what most people do during their lifetime anyway?' To which I answer that it is not very different at all. People use myth and ritual as their means of self-transformation and of recovery in many different situations. I have focused on one situation in which people's suffering revolves around food and eating, but a great deal of what I have found to say is applicable to the human search for better ways to be (and to be with each other), in all its manifestations. Perhaps the ideas in my book will contribute, not only to preventing and alleviating eating disorders, but also to a greater self-acceptance among all people who are still dissatisfied with their bodies.



Some contacts for eating disorder problems:

Liverpool Hospital - (02) 9828 3000

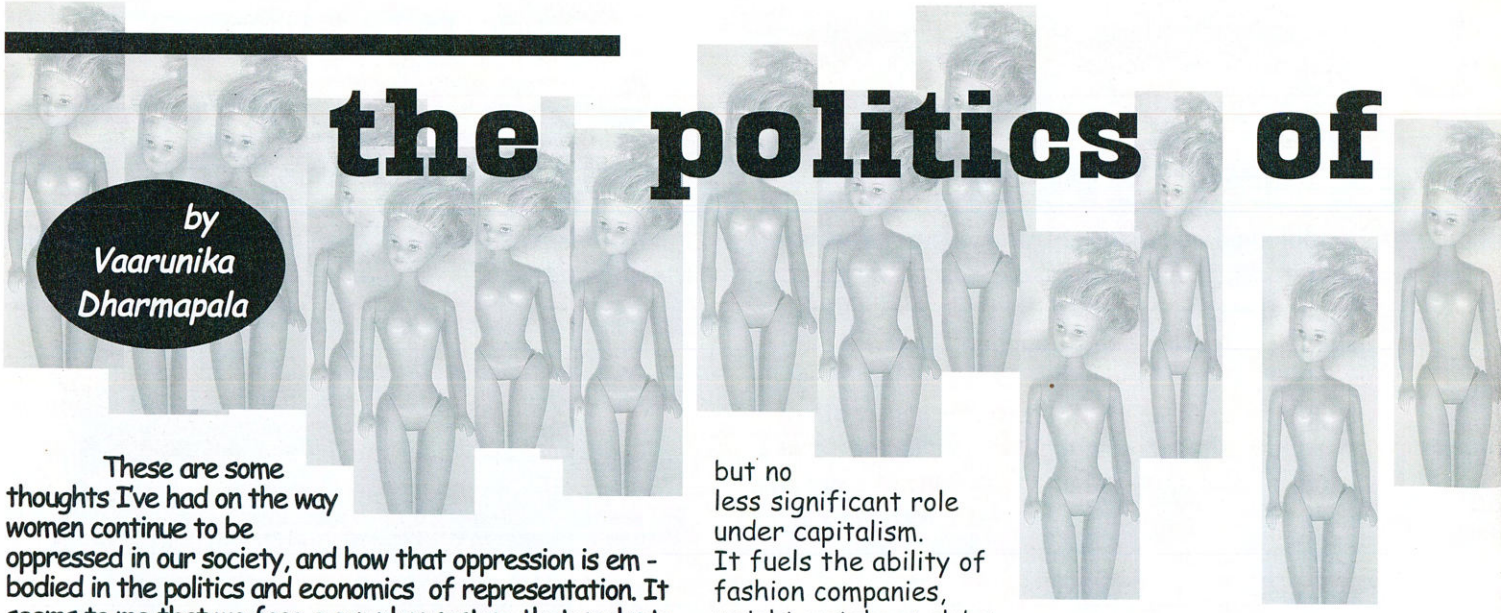
Nepean Hospital, Eating Disorders Unit (02) 47242 000/352

Westmead Hospital Adolescent Unit (02) 9845 6788

South East Sydney Area Health Service has produced several comprehensive booklets on eating disorders (02) 9540 7206

the politics of

by Vaarunika Dharmapala



These are some thoughts I've had on the way women continue to be oppressed in our society, and how that oppression is em - bodied in the politics and economics of representation. It seems to me that we face a complex system that seeks to visualise and codify us in ways antithetical to the supposed ideas of western society – namely, liberty, equality and comradeship. (an epithet I prefer to "brotherhood"). Under the patriarchy and capitalism our oppression takes on varied forms, from the plainly economic, such as unequal pay rates between the sexes, to the more subtly ideological, a glaring example of which is body image.

I've heard a lot of tiresome people say that feminism is an irrelevancy , because now women can work their way up the corporate ladder of capitalism just as well as men. However, you only need to open your eyes to the real world to see the many injustices, inequalities, humiliations and barriers that still face women today. The dubious fact that some socially privileged women have been accepted into the framework of dominant society has had no significant bearing on the lives of young women, older women, working class, Aboriginal or ethnic women. That's a lot of women.

I want to focus on the manipulation of body image by the media as a generic form, including film, literature, magazines, advertising & television. I think the representations of women and women's roles presented in this important aspect of culture plays a necessary role in the social oppression & economic exploitation.

The degrading images of women that we grow up with classify us as primarily a sexual being. So what's wrong with that? We are after all as sexual as men. The difference is that women are cast as sexual beings without agency, to be used & adorned, defined through her body as opposed through he mind, her ideas and her personality. This cleverly reduces us to beings with bodies, obscuring the fact that we are beings with reason as well. This reinforces the economic exploitation of women, ascribing to us characteristics that undermine the role we can play in the world of the intellect, of the labour market, and of political life. Similar to other forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism also plays the role of dividing the disempowered along artificial lines. So men & women wage earners cannot see themselves as a community of the powerless with a common goal. But rather fight out battles constructed by a misogynist culture perpetuated by the elites.

The manipulation of body image also plays a more short term but no less significant role under capitalism. It fuels the ability of fashion companies, weight watchers clubs, dietician, quacks and other cynical money makers to reap enormous profits from the suffering & self destruction of women.

From an early age women are subject to a constant barrage of images, expectations and ideals, often contradictory, which we are expected to fulfil if we are to be truly feminine , truly lovable & successful in our assigned roles in life. We live in a visual age – our lives are governed by the influences of film & advertising, and of course the ubiquitous TV. Because of the importance of the visual in our lives, it is as if the body becomes ever more important as the expression of ourselves. The body becomes at one at the same time both elevated & degraded. It is elevated in the sense that it becomes the only important thing about us, and degraded by becoming a commodity, something that can be bought and sold and have a value ascribed to it, a value that is dictated by the latest fads of the fashion houses and designers.

"From an early age women are subject to a constant barrage of images, expectations and ideals, often contradictory, which we are expected to fulfil if we are to be truly feminine,truly lovable & successful..."

Women, both young and older, are highly vulnerable to the influences of visual media, because of the manner in which 'women' are constructed. Either we conform to the acceptable image or we are outcast from the 'mainstream'. The fulfilment of sexual desire and lover are used as weapons against women. The message is, if you are not tall, slender, blonde, suntanned & intellectually submissive, you're going to find it damned hard to 'catch a man.' And the goal of finding and keeping a male companion is all important of course

This is another example of how representations of women and the slender ideal are used to reinforce the traditional roles of women- however well some women may be doing as lawyers, managers, academics or bricklayers, the ultimate goal should still be the capacity to attract men and keep on attracting one, enough for him to stick around and start a family.

This ideology has been tragically internalised by women, as you can see from the shockingly high rates of anorexia, bulimia, depression, drug abuse and general lack of self-esteem. The number of people negatively affected by the false ideal cannot be underestimated. Very often the most medical and media attention is focused upon those who suffer in

body image

an extreme way. So, everyone knows about women who starve themselves so consistently that they end up as ragged skin and bones, like concentration camp victims. And everyone knows about the women who gorge on cake and biscuits and then are tormented by the thought of the weight they'll gain induce themselves to vomit. But by focusing upon the sensational, the media manage to portray this as an aberrant and abnormal behaviour, practised by an unstable minority. In reality, these reactions are only extremes of what the vast majority of women go through in their lives. And this is perpetuated and encouraged by most forms of mass media. It is fairly safe to say that just about every woman at some time in her life suffers from some form of self hatred engendered by the pressure to conform to an arbitrary body shape. The presentation of women in advertising as passive and sexually available to men serves to reinforce a role that is centred upon the home, the ability to satisfy male desires and the ability to reproduce. Today, we are subject to not only to these pressures, but also to fulfil all these roles adequately, while at the same time taking on a career and being a "super mum". This is a result not only of feminist progress, but also of the higher and ever increasing cost of living that forces families to maintain two incomes in order to have a basically decent standard of living. This would not be a problem, if it were not for the fact that it is still mainly women who have to take on the domestic drudgery of cooking, cleaning, washing,etc,etc.

All this means that women provide industry with a sure fire, reliable consumer base which to target. The spin offs for capital from body image are phenomenal - cosmetics, fashion, exercise regimes and videos, accessories, surgery, self help books, therapy, diet pills and on and on and on. There is no doubt that someone's making profits from the exploitation of women's self image. This seems to be one of the characteristics of modern capitalism - the creation of desires and the fulfilment of those desires by increased consumption.

Body image has changed throughout the decades, and different shapes have come and gone more rapidly in the 20the century. Thin or fat is not even the question - the central issue is how the economic role of women is perceived at a given point in time. Once, to be a real woman you had to be impossibly voluptuous, the Marilyn Monroe mode. Cuddly, submissive, available - she was the passive recipient of male sexuality. This corresponded to the nurturing, mothering, wifing role women were expected to play in the 50's, one that kept them in the home and out of the labour market. Today women play a greater role in the economy, being not only on the receiving end, as consumers, but as workers too.

The oppressive nature of image still exists, but the model has changed. Now thin is what they want us to be. But instead of getting depressed, you can get angry instead. Don't be a victim, be a revolutionary! As women, as feminists, or simply as people who give a shit, we need to point to the facts of women's everyday lives and link this in to the systemic nature of our oppression, the part capital plays in perpetuating it, and the necessity of action to change it!

thanx to 'Damsel' - Uni of WA

Prevalence of Bulimia - Incidence rates for NSW have been estimated at **570** NEW CASES of bulimia nervosa EACH YEAR. (Beumont 1994) The INCIDENCE OF BULIMIA may be as high as **10% IN COLLEGE - AGED FEMALES** (Best 1993)

Prevalence of Anorexia Nervosa - Prevalence of anorexia nervosa is much lower than bulimia with one in 1000 (0.1%) in the at risk population reported in the only well controlled Australian study (Ben - Tovim 1990). Best (1993) in describing ***'NORMALTOWN'*** **IN NSW** suggests **ONE IN EVERY 100 FEMALES OVER 12 YEARS OF AGE** may suffer from ANOREXIA NERVOSA.

Stats from 'Ministrial Summit on Eating Disorders Background Information' booklet - NSW Dept of Health 1996

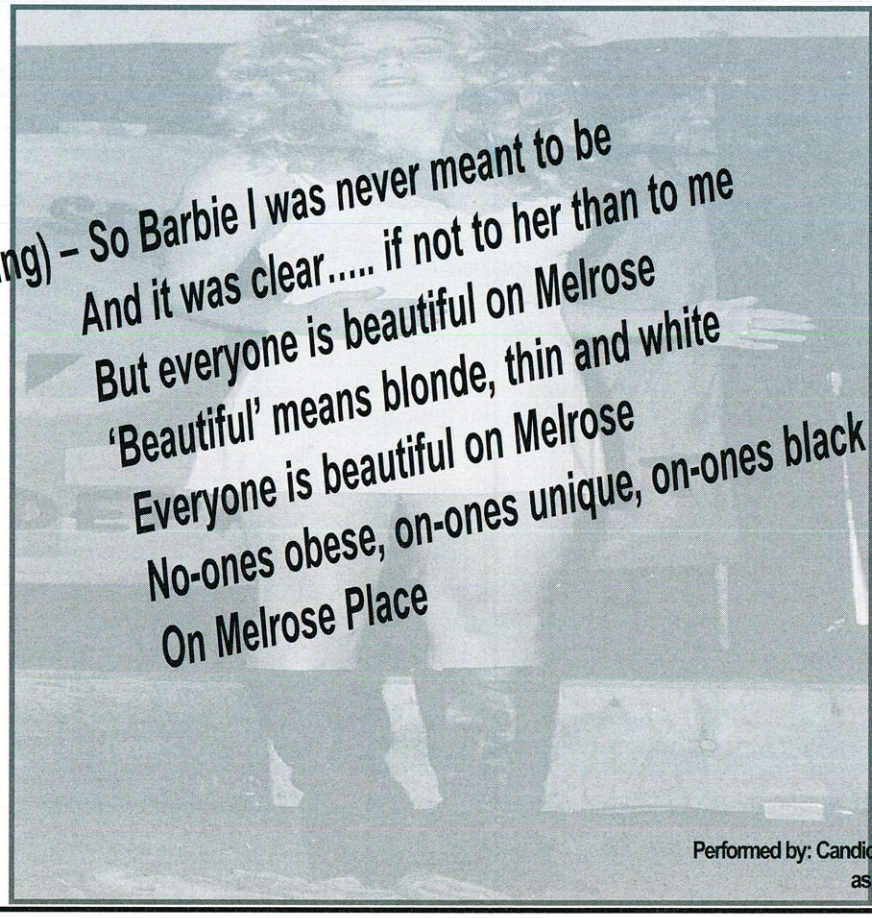
Growing up with Barbie

(spoken) – I grew up wishing for long, thin, straight legs and long dead straight hair. I wanted hard firm high breasts and a short sharp nose. Barbie had a big influence on me as I growing up.

I spent the next few years of my life straightening my hair and buying high-heeled shoes.

It was only half way through high school that I realised that my South African background had a different plan for my body. ' Straight" was just not a part of my genetic vocabulary. ' Round', 'curvaceous' and 'frizzy'- now these were areas I was going to explore.

I flushed all my ideas about beauty and pre-conception about body image down the toilet with the rest of the defecation. It's wonderful to actually be your body, to be in your body.


(sung) – So Barbie I was never meant to be
And it was clear..... if not to her than to me
But everyone is beautiful on Melrose
'Beautiful' means blonde, thin and white
Everyone is beautiful on Melrose
No-ones obese, on-ones unique, on-ones black
On Melrose Place

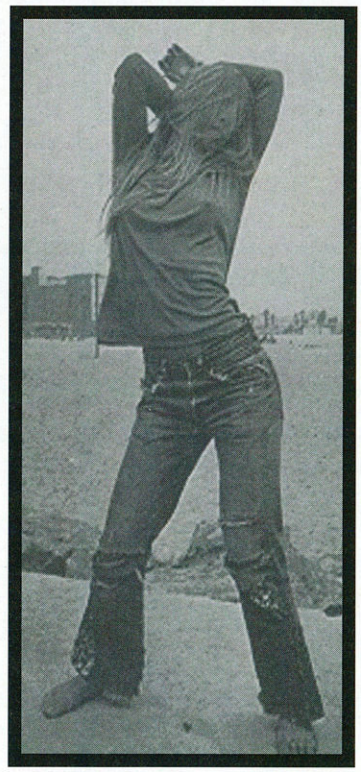
Written by: Candice Bowers
Performed by: Candice Bowers & Rochelle Whyte
as part of Women's Week 1998

WHY A WOMEN'S ONLY SPACE?

by Van Badham

A lot of people, men and women, often ask - why, if we are trying to end sexism, that women at universities (and beyond) demand "separate spaces", or forums, for women, in the form of conferences, rooms and representation? Isn't the creation of a gender-separate space a form of sexism? Why don't we have a SRC/NUS men's officer, a men's conference ("NOMSA")?, a men's room? Ms Badham, NSW NUS President, looks at the reasons why, (even in this Beyond - Post Feminist Afterglow era), women need their own space.

Firstly, I do not believe that creating gender-specific spaces is sexism; I believe it is consideration. I believe that, due to differing biology, the gender-biased history and design of Western society and the influence of equally (and persistent) gender-biased representations within art and themedia - at this point in time persons identified as "women" have issues and concerns very distinct from those of those identified as "men" which place them at specific, multifold disadvantage, with related unhappiness and trauma, within the structures of our current society. There is much evidence to support such a statement. In this article I have isolated seven obvious, physical reasons why "women" are different to "men" and deserve a forum of their own. While I concede that in a couple of incidences it is not only probable but provable that there are experiences within the seven following that small numbers of "men" have shared, I think it is important to remember that our society does not have a history which condones or promotes the collective abuse/discrimination of the male gender, as it does women. The majority of women have endured, are enduring or will endure most of the situations I will subsequently identify. Many women, indeed, have experienced all of them. Probably more women than you think you know... And if anyone can find me a man that menstruates, I personally will build him his very own space, and nail a brass nameplate on the door.



What disadvantages?

a.) Although it is now socially and legally unacceptable for women to be discriminated against, the structures and institutions of modern Western society have their roots in an older, (patriarchal) society which was totally dominated by men. Women have only recently been given access to positions of authority (i.e. in the judiciary, parliament, tertiary institutions, commerce, industry, union movement, the media... it goes on and on and on...), but apart from having to deal with a persisting social construct in the workplace which has always existed to discourage women (for despite legal pretensions to "equal pay for equal work", the reality is that women still earn around 10% less than their male counterparts in the same job), there are many physical disadvantages that women face in their chosen occupations and interactions. For example; air-conditioning systems in offices are designed for men who are wearing suits, not women who are wearing skirts/dresses;doors in public buildings are often made to a heaviness that is beyond a lot of women to open with ease (and near impossible for pregnant women); how many companies do you think go out and buy specially-designed office equipment for pregnant women? My office doesn't have a tampon-dispenser, either. If I start bleeding before lunchtime and I don't have any plugs... I'm fucked.

b.) Women get pregnant, men don't. Similarly, women have to choose between abortion, adoption or motherhood, men don't. .Abortion is a totally loaded issue for women; physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. Furthermore, abortion is absolutely, totally, and in all other ways specificly a woman's choice. Women faced with an unwanted pregnancy are often forced to endure intolerance, discrimination, harassment and blind hatred from other people, as well as institutions (like churches and the legal system) as a result of choices they make about their own bodies. Trauma associated with abortions can last lifetimes. This trauma is equally true for women who adopt out their child/ren - with the social stigma of "unfit mother"-hood (when have you ever heard the term "unfit father"?) attached with the child's removal. At least adopting-out mothers, however have the legal right to do so; in New South Wales, abortion is illegal, so women do not have the legal right over their own bodies. Whether planning to keep the born-baby or adopt-out, pregnant women have specific physical concerns which are, for the most part, ignored by those who have designed our society. I have mentioned before some of the obstacles simple building designs present for pregnant women. This is in addition to institutional organisation that does not allow time

for flexible hours, rest periods, comfort zones, or medical facilities in an emergency. (One of my earliest work experiences was seeing a heavily pregnant woman collapse in her office from haemorrhaging; as the building didn't have a Women's Room, she was taken to the Sick Room – a glorified broom cupboard just off the water heater which had been filled with excess photocopiers).Post-natal conditions are equally unfriendly; systems are are not designed for breast-feeding mothers, and childcare is not yet a reality in the majority of workplaces. Please don't think that I am excluding Universities from this, either. They are as much a workspace as is anywhere else.

And say we don't happen to even get to the pregnancy bit? What about the regiment of the Pill, and the side-effects? Or morning after pills and their often-debilitating physical reactions – vomiting, swelling, random haemorrhaging et al? (And men complain about using condoms. Jesus Christ.).

c.) Women are subjected to sexist intimidation and sexual harassment on a daily level.

It's not only the stares, or the jeers, or the comments, or being looked at as if you're in a delicatessen window, it's also being spoken over when you're speaking. It's not only being called a slut or a slurry, it's also being physically surrounded by people who could beat you to a pulp, and want you to realise it. It's not only the uninvited arse-pinching, tit-tweaking, groin-rubbing, it's walking down the street and getting screamed at, or whistled at, or mooned. It's someone you don't know sitting next to you for no reason on an empty train, and repeatedly fingering your pantyhose. It's a hand on the breast from the Master of your College, or being locked in his room and propositioned, when you just want to run away but you know you've got to see him every day for the rest of your degree, or you're out on your ear.

"Even though stupid bloody Adam ate the fucking apple, it was Eve's fault, wasn't it, when the hard rain fell? This biblical myth is one of the great generic lies in the texts and social values of Western culture which keeps many women demoralised, self-disempowering, and too prepared to forgive perpetrators of violence and abuse."

d.) Women are subjected to sexual assault; both inside and outside the home. Public violence, and the threat of it, can be very, very strong; very few women chance walking alone outside at night-time. Every campus has its share of abductions and assaults - they are not "the news"; they are real, they are savage, and they even happen in broad daylight.

Not convinced? Here are some really happy statistics on the more physically violent state of affairs:

* 1 in 4 women will be sexually assaulted/raped by the age of twenty-five.
* 1 in 3 women will be sexually assaulted/raped at some stage in their life.
* 1 in 7 women will be raped within marriage.
* In at least 84% of sexual assaults/rapes, the perpetrator is known (family members included).
* 54.7% of sexual assaults/rapes occur at social gatherings.

These, of course, are only the reported statistics. It is estimated that up to 70% of Australian women are sexually assaulted or raped at some stage of their lifetime. Most women do not report their assaults. And that's just physical assaults; I have never come across a tabulation of female survivors of abuse. Why not? Why not report an assault? Why not leave an abuser?Why not, indeed. For a start, women in abusive relationships often lack the cash to leave, or have nowhere to go, or have children they can't take with them and can't leave behind. That, and because abused or assaulted women invariably blame themselves; women are conditioned by art, the media and persisting ancient social values that they deserve what they get.

Even though stupid bloody Adam ate the fucking apple, it was Eve's fault, wasn't it, when the hard rain fell? This biblical myth is one of the great generic lies in the texts and social values of Western culture which keeps many women demoralised, self-disempowering, and too prepared to forgive perpetrators of violence and abuse. Women from birth are assaulted with the narrative of the female temptress, responsible for all calamity; assaulted and abused women constantly berate themselves with "If only" arguments - "if only I hadn't worn the low-cut top, if only I hadn't danced with him, if only I hadn't let him kiss me...". Society can't handle telling women the truth; that being sexually assaulted is never, ever their fault. It would put too much responsibility on society to solve the problem, and undo the centuries of conditioning which have taught men that hurting women is ok.

e.) Women are subjected daily to media representations of their gender which are very public, highly sexual and absolutely degrading. I cite, specifically; the Howard Showers billboards (tall, thin, naked women clenching their breasts and pouting, apparently to sell jeans), the Warner "I love being a woman" lingerie campaigns (tall, thin, half-naked women wearing trampy underwear and too much makeup), the Pizza Hut girl (Is she on the menu? What will happen in the next ad - will he bend her over the table so he can fuck her and rest his pizza on her back?). Is it any wonder that we become to easily objectified? Media representations of women also reinforce unreal body images which a lot of women, old and young, feel compelled to emulate. In America, studies have shown high percentages of girls who begin dieting at the age of eight, and that the "average American girl" will adopt some kind of medically unnecessary diet control by the age of thirteen. Over 90% of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa sufferers (let's not forget, not all of these cases are reported, either) are female. Kate Moss exists, and is considered "super" beautiful.

f.) It is statistically proven that women

do more work for less money in our society. This statistic comes not only from comparing averaged rates of pay (see above), but from the fact that women overwhelmingly do more housework, food-acquiring and childrearing than men. Just because it isn't paid, doesn't mean it isn't work.

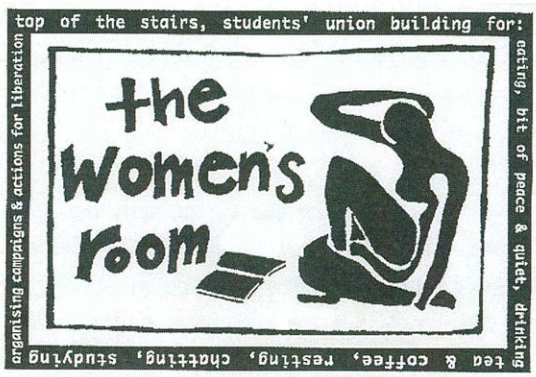
g.) Women menstruate; menstruation is often messy, inconvenient, uncomfortable, tiring and painful. And, unless you want to drip blood all over the floor, it is expensive; for reasons best known to old men with dickcheese, tampons and sanitary pads are taxed as a "luxury item" (ie. the luxury is not spending an entire week doing your laundry) - a totally thorough blood-proofing for a five-day period will cost around $8 (provided, of course, you don't leave your tampons/pads at home)THERE IS NO MALE EQUIVALENT TO MENSTRUATION IN ALL ITS GORY DETAIL.

Just because women lack access to institutions run by and full of men, and lack comfort in situations designed by men, and lack resources because they receive less renumeration and hold less property than men, and lack security because men believe they have the right to harm them, and lack time because they do work which men refuse to share, and get pregnant which men don't, and have periods which men don't, and work harder than men do, and are repeatedly assaulted with negative stereotypes created by men, and don't even have the legal right over their own bodies as the result of laws written and enforced by men - why have women's forums?

BECAUSE: A woman's forum is where any woman can share experiences or provide support to another woman. A woman's forum is where any woman can seek and find information on issues pertaining to herself, as a woman - free from intrusion or harassment. A women's forum is where any woman can feel comfortable. A women's forum is where any woman will not be treated like a piece of meat. A women's forum is where any woman can feel physically understood. A women's forum is where any woman can feel safe.

It's as simple as that.

P.S. Eve was framed. Blokes wrote the Bible.


top of the stairs, students' union building for:
the women's room
organising campaigns & actions for liberation
tea & coffee, resting, chatting, studying,
eating, bit of peace & quiet, drinking

it's your women's room - use it!

Kingswood campus has a lush women's room open 5 days a week... It's located in the Student Union B'ding N. Come in for a cuppa on our comfy black vinyl lounge & check out our fab library. Collective meetings are held Thursday fortnightly 12 - 2 pm. Call Annie, Robin or Katerina (02) 47360686 for info

And GUESS WHAT!!! We will be opening a NEW WOMEN's ROOM at Rydlemere campus Semester 2.....Watch out for details of the launch.....

Who is Athena?

Well, seeing as this mag is dedicated to her, we thought we had better fill you in on the credentials of this most glorious of goddesses!

Athena (Athene)

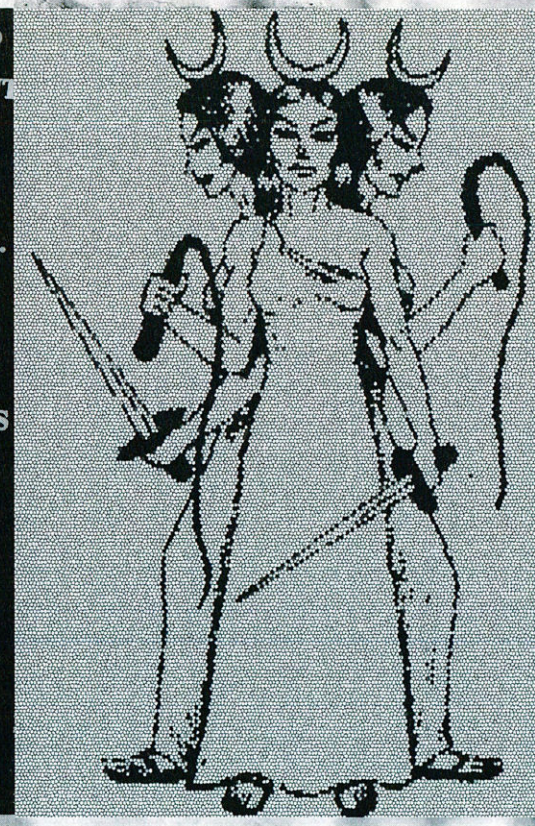
Mother-Goddess of Athens, worshiped as Holy Virgin, Athene Parthenia, in the Parthenon, her "Virgin-temple." Though classic writers insisted on her chastity, older traditions gave her several consorts, such as Hephaestus and Pan. She was united with the phallic Pallas, whose "Palladium" was a lingam, later Rome's greatest fetish.

Athene came from North Africa. She was the Libyan Triple Goddess Neith, Metis, Medusa, Anath, or Ath-enna. An inscription at Larnax-Lapithou named her Athene in Greek, Anat in Phoenician. Pre-Hellenic myths said she came from the uterus of Lake Tritonis (Three Queens) in Libya. Egyptians sometimes called Isis Athene, which meant, "*I have come from myself.*"

Greeks claimed Athene was born from Zeus's head, after he swallowed her mother Metis - i.e., Medusa, "Female Wisdom," formerly symbolised by the Gorgoneum, Athene's snake-haired mask, invested with power to turn men to stone. Gorgo, or Gorgon, was Athene's Destroyer aspect. Funerary statues or phallic pillars were her "men turned to stone," perhaps even identified with the pillars of the Parthenon which was seized by Christians at an unknown date in the 5th or 6th century A.D. and rededicated as a temple of the virgin Mary.

WHY IS THERE SOMETHING ODD AND UNNATURAL ABOUT WOMEN WHO WANT TO TRY TO DO SOMETHING WITH THEIR LIVES? WHY ARE WOMEN SUCH FUCKING APPENDAGES IN EVERYTHING?..... FEMINISM ISN'T OVER, IT DIDN'T FAIL, BUT SOMETHING NEW HAPPENED - GRRRL POWER ... NEXT TIME A BLOKE FEELS YOUR ARSE, PATRONISES YOU, SLAGS OFF YOUR BODY - GENERALLY TREATS YOU LIKE SHIT - FORGET THE MORAL HIGHGROUND, FORGET HE'S BEEN INSTILLED WITH PATRIARCHY AND IS A VICTIM TOO, FORGET RATIONALE AND DEBATE. JUST DECK THE BASTARD.

T HU N D ER P US SY



It's Nothing New

Question: Do the phrases "current Australian government" and "women perceived as a viable, functioning sector of the economic community" belong in the same sentence?

Answer: No. In fact, the two seem mutually exclusive. Since the Liberal/ National Coalition government slimed to power in the Australian 1996 Federal election, there have been virtually no indications that the government recognises women (and I am using the term 'women' in a generic sense) as crucial to the social and economic realities of Australian life.

The Government's agreement with the Democrats to keep the Equal Remuneration Clause in the Workplace Relation Act is a small exception (and wow, what a big concession that was.) Women are constantly referred to in instances of existing solely in relation to "the family", for example, "The Government acknowledges women's major role in maintaining family life...". What about those women who aren't interested in having a family? Or those single dads who provide the major role in their family life?

Added to this is the impact that changes to family tax formulation and labour market programs have had: if a married woman who has been unemployed for some time wants to return to the work force, and her husband ha been employed while she has been out of work, she is not eligible for intensive assistance to find a job. Under the tax rebate laws the non-breadwinner (in many cases, the wife) is actually not encouraged to earn income, in that it will risk the level of rebates they are eligible for. Sound fair? This implies that women are still thought of as dependent entities, relying on their hubbies for not only money but also social acceptance.

The Government's stance on HECS (ie the increases in HECS through the tiered pay-back scheme and the lowering of repayment thresholds) may effect the future enrolment of both mature aged women and women enrolling in traditionally male-oriented courses like computing and law (even with the pre-tier HECS rate, because of the tradition of women working in lower-paid jobs than men, 1 in 4 women will still be repaying HECS at the age of 65)

The final issue is the fact that the Coalition Government has cut subsidies for publicly funded child care centres. (see article page 20 for more details) Nice touch that one. Even on this university campus, child care is more expensive, and may eliminate low-paid parents from using child care services, making it harder for women with kids to study or undertake employment.

And so the cycle continues.

- Mary-Anne Breeze, Arts Editor, 'The Tert', Wollongong Uni

Towards a FREE Education

The University of Western Sydney, like many other universities around the country, faced the decision to introduce up front fees for domestic undergraduates. That means that if someone does not get the required TER for a particular course, s/he is able to pay a sum of money (between $30000 and $150000 - depending on the course and the demand) to be enrolled. Naturally, that was a move that the student movement fought and continues to fight at every campus, but especially at a university like ours. At education rallies everywhere you can hear chants of "Education for all, not just the rich" and "Education's not for profit", but is it enough to call for a free or publicly funded education system.

The reality is that we study within a system that exists within capitalism. Under this system, it is necessary to have one group of people in a position of power and dominance (in our society it tends to be white, able bodied men) and a group of people in a servile position (in our society it tends to be women, Aboriginies, ethnics, disabled, queers or any other marginalised group). Naturally, there are exceptions to this rule.

When a system of so-called "free" education was introduced under the Whitlam government the tertiary education sector went from being restricted to a few middle class elite (originally men but late extended to women, but still of middle class background) to including people from all sorts of backgrounds. However, even though more people of such diversity were able to attend university, the course curriculums were never questioned. We still learned exactly what we were supposed to learn to be able to fit into the corporate places made for us. Even though we could dissent to the information presented to us, and challenge their values, no alternative curriculum was ever offered.Information available to all students was and still is, to a great extent, governed by the corporate stakeholders. Take for example the make-up of the library books at most campuses. Most books have an Anglo-Saxon perspective. Most books only cover issues that they are willing to have us discuss within their university forum. This situation is only exacerbated with the continual cuts to library funding and other attacks to information that is so often masked by the term "economic rationalism".

Even when we are successful with our struggles against up front fees, voluntary student unionism (more aptly called anti-student unionism), and HECs, under this system of capitalism one method of user pays will only be replaced by another.

The future of education will only improve if it operated outside of capitalism. Students must move away from being intellectual prostitutes, exploited for their acquired skills. Instead, students should work on being intellectuals, not in the elitist sense of the word, but rather people with developed thought, perception and a critical interpretation of the world.

The community needs to start realising its responsibility for education and take over not only its funding, but also its control.

For more information please go to the Students' Union and grab a copy of "Roar: Be Heard" for an article called "Education and Capitalism".

Melissa de Silva
(NSW NUS Small & Regional Officer)

WHAT'S WRONG WITH WEST?

JULIE WELLS, National Research Officer, for the NTEU, looks at the impact of the Federal Government's West review on women.

The West Committee's Discussion Paper, Learning for Life, appeared in a blaze of negative publicity in November last year. It was the first report of the Government's commissioned review of higher education financing and policy, which is intended to recommend `a blueprint' for the next twenty years.

The document proposes an extreme deregulatory agenda for the sector;centred around a proposal to replace university operating grant funding with a funding allocation system based on `student choice'. Instead of receiving funding according to a student profile negotiated annually with the Government, universities would be funded according to the numbers of students who chose to take up places within each institution. At the same time, the Government's funding allocation per student - or `voucher' - would cover only part of the costs of study, and institutions would be permitted to set their own `top-up' fees. Indeed, Learning for Life proposes that the fee-paying regime in Australian universities - which currently forbids the imposition of up-front fees on more than 25% of undergraduates in any course - should be completely deregulated; thus opening the door to thevirtually unfettered privatisation of Australian universities.

So reminiscent was this proposal of the education package put forward in the Coalition's unpopular Fightback! manifesto in 1993 that the Government delayed the Report's release until Cabinet had met and agreed to distance itself from its recommendations. In the words of one media commentator, the Government `did not want another fight' about higher education.

The speed with which the Government sank the draft report is a reflection on increasingly vocal opposition to its funding cuts and deregulation of higher education over the past few years, and reflects well on staff and students who have participated in these campaigns. However, there has been remarkably little analysis of the likely practical implications of the Report's recommendations for particular sections of the community - for Indigenous Australians, for example,or for those working and studying in different discipline areas, and for women. It is important that we consider these questions as, regardless of the fate of the West Review, the issues it raises will not go away in a hurry.

So, why is Learning for Life particularly pernicious from the point of view of women aspiring to study and/or work within the higher education sector? The first and most obvious answer is that, under the proposals put forward by the West Committee, student choice would be strongly contingent on individual purchasing power. With institutions free to set their own top-up fees, the costs of high-demand courses - particularly in so-called `prestige' institutions - would skyrocket. We've already seen this happen in relation to up-front undergraduate fees, with costs in Dentistry at Sydney University topping $100,000 per year.

Experience in the postgraduate arena teaches us that when fees are deregulated, women miss out. A recent Higher Education Council Report on postgraduate fees found that women were severely under-represented among fee-paying students. This is partly because they are less likely than men to have the financial resources to pay for postgraduate study. They still tend to earn less: in 1996, graduate starting salaries averaged at $27,500 for women, compared with $30,000 for men. According to the Graduate Careers Council, this effect is due more to men's over-representation in fields of study leading to lucrative employment, rather than pay inequity within any particular field. However, the GCCA also found that women are less likely to receive employer support in the form of study leave or assistance with the payment of fees.

> ***"Experience in the postgraduate arena teaches us that when fees are deregulated, women miss out."***

There is unintentional irony in the title Learning for Life, given that the impact of its recommendations on opportunities to undertake lifelong learning are entirely negative. West treats every potential undergraduate like a school-leaver, leaving open the question of what opportunities are available to people who return to study later in life or need to retrain to gain employment. Women historically have comprised a large section of mature age applicants for higher education. These are the people most likely to have financial commitments and/or dependents, and the most vulnerable to increased charges. Demand for higher education among this group dropped by 10% in 1997 and looks like falling a further 11%

in 1998, largely because of the increased costs of HECS and the lowering of the threshold for repayment. In an environment where fees were completely deregulated, possibilities for undertaking higher education later in life would inevitably dwindle. And what of women working in higher education? The fluctuations of the market would inevitably lead to reduced security of employment for all staff, especially those engaged in teaching. Already, we've seen evidence of the impact of market volatility as, in the wake of the Asian currency crisis, language centres around the country are shedding up to eighty percent of their staff, and employing others casually and on contracts as short as six weeks. The introduction of a `voucher' based funding model would exacerbate institutions' financial instability: the actual amount of funding available in any year would be unknown until the students actually enrolled, and could vary throughout the year depending on the numbers of students transferring to other institutions. Institutional planning in the medium to long-term would be next to impossible.

Instability has always underpinned employers' arguments for casual and short-term contract employment. In an environment where 73 % of academic staff with continuing employment are men, any further reduction of opportunities for continuing employment would have serious implications for academic women.

So, how do we combat these trends in an environment where the term `equity' has currency only in relation to the so-called `level playing field' for market players? We have to continue to draw the connections between equality of opportunity in higher education participation and employment on one hand and, on the other, social cohesion and a thriving culture and economy. We have to remind the politicians - and, more importantly, their voting constituency - that women may comprise more than half the undergraduate population, but they remain severely underrepresented in non-traditional areas and in postgraduate research, and in the senior levels of academic and general staff employment. If they are further disadvantaged by the imposition of a market-based approach to higher education, then the community as a whole suffers from the waste of talent which ensues. We also need to find new - and more compelling - arguments that spending on higher education by Government is an investment, rather than a cost; and that the role of the university as critic and conscience of the society must not be sacrificed to market forces.

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sick of shelves full of droll books?

feel like some creative experimentation?

during sem. 2 nepean women's collective is producing.....

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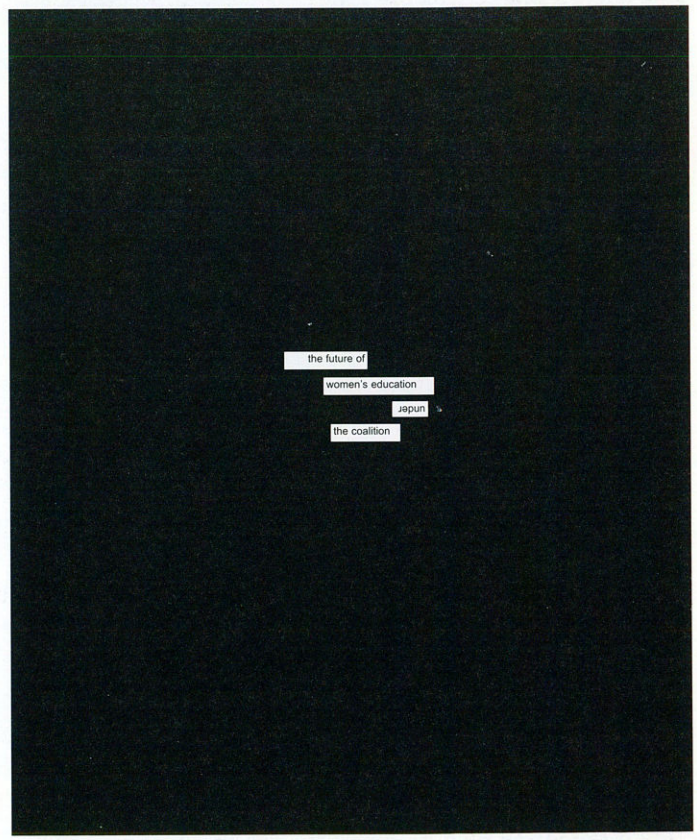

Doing the HARD GRIND

by Karen Ford
UWS Post Grad Women's Officer

In a world where women must feel the need to be a virtual over achiever, (if not an actual one); where she should prove her intelligence, (usually requiring some sort of expensive university degree); be rational and articulate, (usually requiring the same); be nurturing and family oriented (taking on the majority of the responsibility for the running and cohesiveness of the family) ; hardworking, (in order to do the degree, have the money to pay for it and still maintain her responsibilities within the family); be emotional, (but not overly so); and yet still maintain the outward appearance of a cool, calm, collected and attractive, (ready to answer to both the body and the fashion police), women of the nineties, what we discover is that we are basically doing the hard grind.

In my case this actually means being woken at 3am, (and then again at 4 and 7am), by the stinging and piercing pain of a toothache. Assuming that I must have a hole given my negligent attitude to visiting the dentist, (and frankly my resistance to forking out the ninety bucks to pay for the treatment), I decided to bite the bullet, as they say, and go. So after begging for an appointment that meant I wouldn't be in agony for the next two weeks I took myself there.

Lying back in the chair I could feel the dentist poking and prodding, taking X-rays and shinning a 1000 k/watt light into my retina. 'Oh god are all my teeth going to drop out, is my life of chewing over'. Of course the truth was that there was no decay and my pain must be caused by grinding my teeth! All very well until I discover that there is absolutely nothing he can do. After sitting back and realising that there is a definite possibility that I was not going to leave the dentist cured, and then considering the advantages of just throwing myself out of his second story window, we talked of the need for me to stop this incessant grinding, (even though it was more than likely that I was doing it in my sleep).

So how was I to tackle this new obstacle, despite my reality of being a postgraduate student undertaking research for the first time, (the result of which could determine the course of the rest of my life!!!!!), as well as learn and do exams in an area I hadn't studied since school but that may help with my career prospects, who was also trying to earn money and feeling tired and stressed, but making damn sure not to appear so. Despite all this, I had to stop grinding my teeth. For me it seemed that if I couldn't obey the body police by whittling my shape down to nothing , my alternative was to grind my teeth away to nothing. So life wasn't meant to be easy I hear you say, but maybe we should consider how hard it should actually be. For many postgraduate women, and in particular those postgraduate women from non-traditional areas such as engineering, agriculture and science, reality is that life can be a particularly hard grind. For postgraduate women our reality constantly reminds us that access is one thing. Retention and progression are another.

Although women are entering into non-traditional areas in greater numbers than they have in the past, when it comes down to further study there is still substantially less women. They have not been able to build a critical mass in these areas of study. The significance of this is that in past studies it has been shown that "the presence of a sizeable number of women students already ahead serves to attract new women." (Byrne, 1993, p 33) Because of the lower rate of women entering postgraduate study in engineering, science and agriculture compared to those who actually finish their undergraduate study it must be said that, women's lower representation is partly caused by their experiences in higher education and thus is an extension of the experiences of women in the schooling system. The university as an "institution does not exist outside of the social factors which act as a barrier to the progression of women in SET (science, engineering and technology) disciplines" (Byrne, 1993, p 33). This lack of progression for women in non-traditional areas has also recently been outlined in a study funded by the National Tertiary Education Union entitled 'Gender Pay Equity in Australian Higher Education'. The "study confirms that female academics are significantly less likely than their male counterparts to have a PhD. The fact that this is now almost an entry level qualification, certainly constitutes a major barrier to promotion at the most senior levels, means that this is a critical issue for women" (Probert, 1998, p 90).

Although this discrepancy in both the number of PhDs completed by women and the generally lower pay ratio for women exists across all disciplines, something can be said of the position of women in

non-traditional areas. Firstly, according to data on the percentage of staff receiving extra payments by sex
discipline and group, women received significantly less inMaths/Science/Admin/Bus/Law/Engineering/Med/BltEnv/Agriculture and Performing Arts. They received relatively the same payments in Hum/Soc Sci and significantly more in Health Science. In other words in all the non-traditional areas and perhaps one or two of the traditional areas women received significantly less extra payments as academics and that this could be attributed at least in part to the lack of women completing PhDs and thus being unable to move on to more senior levels where they were more likely to receive extra payments. And secondly that even "younger female academics may still be failing to complete PhDs at the same rate as their male counterparts, in which case attention needs to turn to the nature of postgraduate research support and the increasingly competitive casual labour market among postgraduate students as well as the continuing issue of family responsibilities" (Probert, 1998, p 89).

..."younger female academics may still be failing to complete PhDs at the same rate as their male counterparts, in which case attention needs to turn to the nature of postgraduate research support and the increasingly competitive casual labour market amongst postgraduate students..." (Probert, 1998)

For women in non-traditional areas the nature of postgraduate research support becomes increasingly important given their male dominated (and for some women the additional difficulty of the predominantly white) work environment. For many women in these areas the support provided by a mentor is increasingly important. Ann Brooks in her study on academic women in New Zealand points out that, "academic women were, in the main, united in their view that mentorship and the practice of mentoring could act as support and reinforce their sense of identity and academic scholarship in the academy" (Brooks, 1997, p 115). Because it is generally recognised as an important support for a student trying to find their career path then discrimination against women in this area may also act as a major barrier to women's status in the university. Again this is particularly significant for women in areas that are dominated by men because "it seemed to be a generally held assumption that same-sex mentoring was preferable" (Brooks, 1997, p52). However without the presence of a critical mass of female academics in these disciplines women may be more likely to miss out on having a mentor. Given the lack of female academics in non-traditional areas and the fact that there is an increasing presence of female students in these disciplines the issue of whether or not male academics are taking on the role of a mentor for female students is significant in understanding the nature of postgraduate support for female students.

In her recent study on academic women Brooks sites an example of the problems of the practice of mentorship for female PhD students in the USA. She says that "when I worked in the USA mentorship was one grievance most brought up by women PhD students. They said that even if they did better than men in exams, when it came to choosing research assistants, professors always took male students; not because they were actively sexist but because they felt more comfortable working closely with male students. Since all the professors were men (economics - male-dominated) this meant women students were excluded from opportunities to 'learn by doing'" (Brooks, 1997, p53).

It is examples like these that do not augur well for female students in non-traditional areas. However if we are to address these issues there are a few things we must keep in mind. Firstly "any model for improving the mentorship process by male academics will need to take account of both the possibility that some women will have a different career path than men and that, simultaneously, other women will increasingly have a career path indistinguishable from the male one. To use one assumption, to the exclusion of the other is to return to sex role stereotyping" (Byrne, 1993 p144). Secondly, the aims of feminist poststructuralism must be taken into account when addressing women's experience of higher education. That is a model for improving mentorship must also take into account the diversity of women in terms of race, ethnicity, class, age and nationality. It must recognise that women from different backgrounds experience the discourses of power relations in the academy differently. Thus an understanding of the function of mentoring must possess a clear understanding that "focusing on gender alone will not capture the realities of women's education" (Brooks, 1997. p 131).

Perhaps when universities address the discriminatory practices that have lead to the gender pay inequity and the lower ratio of women holding PhDs, then the ability of women to progress to senior levels in universities will not involve such a hard grind.

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"Childcare remains a highly contested issue and is exceedingly vulnerable to changes in the political and economic environment." Deborah Brennan (unpub) Just how vulnerable is being seen right now, writes ERICA LEWIS (Researcher, ANU). Erica has been tracking changes to childcare funding since the 1996 Federal Election. The results of the 96/97 Budget cuts can now be seen and the affects of the 97/98 Budget are now being felt as many of them had an implementation date of April 27.

While we would like to talk about childcare and parents, and there is no doubt where fathers are primary care givers that they will be as adversely affected as mothers, a quick nod to reality is important. It is still mainly women who are responsible for caring for children and have to meet the costs of their wage. It is still more likely that women will be single parents. It is still more likely that a woman in a heterosexual relationship will feel the societal pressure to sacrifice her education or work for her partners. It is still women who are hassled for 'abandoning' their children. Cuts to childcare funding are an unsubtle attack on women's hard won freedoms.

The Federal Liberal/National Government in making its changes to childcare funding, removing the operational funding grants and relaxing many of the regulatory controls stated that they were increasing the choices open to parents looking for childcare. However, what are the choices: if a parent needs to work or study yet cannot find or afford childcare or if parents have to mix and match childcare that is available to meet their needs, there is the attendant possibility of one of many arrangements falling through (Wangmann 1994). Freedom of choice is a mantra of this federal government, but the choices only exist if you can pay for them.

"The 1998 budget did little to reverse any of the cuts to childcare funding. The government claims that they have increased funding by 5%, but that is across aged care, disability programs, family support and childcare, but most of that paltry sum, has gone on trying to buy back the aged vote that they lost in the nursing homes bungle."

Historically the funding of childcare has been used as a method to influence the labour market. In times when the government has needed women in the workforce it has increased funding to childcare centres. When they face high unemployment or wish to drive women form the workforce they lower the funding of childcare (Rowe 1982). Once the cost of childcare exceeds what one partner earns, chances are that one of you will give up work. Women on average earn less than men.

The Coalition Government is doing its best to destroy a childcare system that had taken the work of many to build. Since their election in 1996 the Federal Government has left almost no area of the childcare sector unscathed.

In 1996 they declared that Childcare Assistance (CA) would not be indexed for the next two years. The indexation changes saving the government $87 million, but will see the same amount paid by parents as an increase in the gap fee. In addition the Government announced that CA would be capped at 50 hours a week for work-related childcare, which means if you use more than 50 hours, you have to pay the full cost of those hours.

The 50 hour cap which came into force on April 27 1998 particularly affects students trying to combine work, study and family commitments and parents form the sprawling outer suburbs of our major cities.

Additionally the operational subsidies to community based childcare centres were stopped. This measure will save the Federal Government $41 million each full year from 97/98. However, this affects approximately 1200 centres nationally and was responsible for an average increase in childcare costs of $18 per week till August 1997, with many centres predicting further increases in January 1998. The $18 rise in the first six months of 1997 was double the increase for the entirety of 1996 (NACBCS 1997:1).

The 97/98 Budget was not as bad as many had feared, but it wasn't good either. The Government capped the growth in subsidised places in long day care centres to 7000 places in each of the next two years, saving $207 million over four years. While this cap was welcomed by some groups, as it came with planning controls, directing growth to those areas most in need, it is important to note that growth of 7000 places per year for the next two years will not meet the growing demand for childcare (ABS 1995). Also centres will be able to expand outside of this cap, but the Federal Government will not pay any Childcare Assistance or Childcare Cash Rebate for them, once again meaning that the places will only be available to those able to pay their full cost.

As a further blow to Community Based Long Day Care (CBLDC) Centres the Federal Government restricted the growth of CBLDC to those areas where no private provider is prepared to establish. While CBLDC used to be the mainstay of long day care, the decision of previous Labor Governments to allow CA and operational subsidies to be paid to private providers, greatly undermined the position of CBLDC. This latest government decision sees CBLDC firmly marginalised.

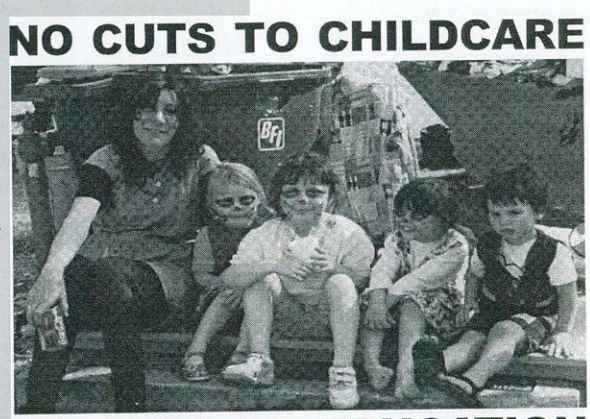
The marginalisation of CBLDC not only restricts access to what is traditionally high quality, low cost care, but also helps to destroy what was another of the CBLDC priorities, parents involvement in their children's care.

The 1998 budget did little to reverse any of the cuts to childcare funding. The government claimsthat they have increased funding by 5%, but that is across aged care, disability programs, family support and childcare, but most of that paltry sum, has gone on trying to buy back the aged vote that they lost in the nursing homes bungle.

In fact the only additional spending on childcare that I could find, was in the form of an information service about government and community programs that help families, with a budget allocation of $8.6 million over four years. (Budget figures used above are from the Department of Health & Family Services Budget Papers, the Community Childcare Association, ACOSS and the AECA Budget Briefing)

Despite the current Liberal/National Governments rhetoric of caring for families, the only families they are interested in caring for a clearly those stereotypical nuclear families that are increasingly hard to find, where mum stays home with the kids and dad goes out to work.

This article only looks at changes to childcare funding since the '96 Federal Election, if you would like to see a historical document on these isssues email Erica Lewis at- rel@isd.canberra.edu.au



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Parenting

by Annie Connellan,UWS Co - Women's Officer & Student Parent

Being a parent and attending university can be problematic. For a start class timetables are sometimes not very parent friendly. I myself have two evening classes this semester (5-8pm). I have to find babysitters for both evenings, which is costly but essential. Evening classes also disrupt the family routine for dinner etc.

The recent government changes to childcare funding has seen huge increases in fees charged by childcare centres. For eg. a full time working woman wanting five days care can expect to pay on average of $175.00 per week. A parent with a low income and receiving full subsidies can expect to pay between $15 - $20+ per day for care. These are quite substantial amounts to have to pull from an already tight budget.

Because of restricted income while studying it is almost essential for student parents to partake in some kind of part-time work. (Young children do not understand that all of a sudden you don't have any money to get them anything anymore) Income has to be generated to simply put food on the table each night.

Study time is usually restricted to late at night after the evening rush is over and children have been fed, bathed, read to, played with, and finally put to bed. Many would consider now the time to rest after a full days activity, but no! the student parent must sit up and commence a few more hours work (study). For myself it is often after midnight before I go to bed, exhausted, with the exception of the all night marathons that go on the night before an assignment is due.

Up like clockwork in the morning, with the mad rush to get all kids dressed, fed, and washed ready for school. Lunches have to be made, hair brushed and tied back, bags packed, hats on, bikes ready to go. This time of day can be a nightmare for already tired parents. Try not to yell too much at the kids before they start their day.

Housework ? what's that ! - Loads of washing (with 3 kids I have at least one load a day) get done in the evening then hung out in the dark (usually around 11pm). Washing up gets done first thing in the morning or first thing in the afternoon as with garbage removal, composting and recycling material.

Shopping is usually done at any time that can be squeezed into the day. Fortunately a particular supermarket in Penrith stays open 24hrs so recently I have taken to doing my shopping late at night eg. after 10pm. Now I can enjoy a peaceful stroll through the isles without the kids screaming at me. Shopping with kids IS a nightmare!!

Kids have to picked up from school at 3pm everyday - not always in agreement with many timetables. This process has to be continued everyday without fail. It is this continuity that tires most parents. There are no holidays when you are a parent.

If you are interested in attending a social event for student parents contact Annie on 0417289611 or leave a message in the Student Union 0247360232.

Wharfies are not

Alongside attacks on collective organising at the waterfront, student organisations have also come under assault. In WA and Victoria, anti-student organisation legislation has been operating since 1994. 1998 has both seen the fight against the anti-student union legislation of the Liberal Parties of these states continue but also an attempt to widen the VSU net to a national level. These attacks are nothing new. Students have always fought the intervention of government stand Vice Chancellors in how student affairs is organised. And on numerous occasions this threat was defeated by student organisations.

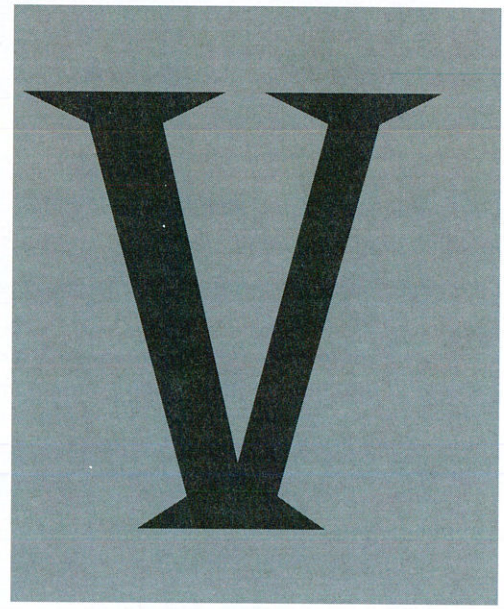
What is also not surprising is that this announcement on VSU came when the Coalition was riding high on the disgusting sacking of 1400 wharfies. This government is intent on attacking a whole range of different forms of collective organising. Since then, the government have been a bit quiet on what they are doing - largely because the government has been preoccupied by the community outrage over its support and complicacy with Patrick's sackings.

Recently the Sydney Morning Herald published an article which stated that the Government's position had not changed from that stated in its higher education policy before the 1996 election, which opposed students universal membership thus the funding of "students union political activity".

Around the same time bureaucrats from the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs were touring campuses in Victoria and Western Australia looking at the impact of state based legislation, and the difference in the forms of the legislation in these two states. It would appear that in Victoria they went to Latrobe University Bundoora where the spoke with the General Manager of the Students' Union, Melbourne University where they spoke only to the administration and the Victoria University of Technology where it is unclear who they spoke to. You may well ask when they will actually speak to students. If they do what was done in Victoria and WA, the only students they will speak to will be the members of the campus liberal students clubs.

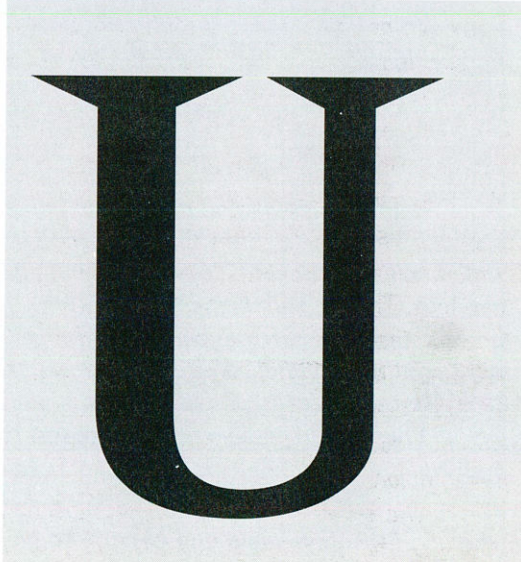
When Senator Natasha Stott Despoja from the Democrats asked in the Senate what the Liberals were doing, she was given a half answer. The answer was that the Liberals have had legal advice from the Attorney-General's Department, that no further advice is being sought at this stage. All members of the government will be briefed and advised of the legal advice during the course of government consideration of the issue and that the Government is considering options on voluntary student unionism.

VSU is a Misnomer- Voluntary student unionism is a misnomer. It should more accurately be called anti-student organisation. It is not an expression of any principle of 'voluntary membership' of student organisations, but a very specific ideological attack. Whilst student organisations have never enjoyed a completely free hand in how they spend student money (for example they have to obey the law). However VSU legislation constitutes a massive additional layer of control and potential intervention. VSU legislation means resources are lost - phones, photocopying, physical building space and even student representative positions on bodies like the University Council.



The willingness, and perceived necessity of conservatives to intervene in student organisations was spelled out in a leaked Liberal Party document early in process of introducing VSU in Victoria that read: "we do not want compulsory student monies flowing out to anti-Kennett and anti-Coalition campaigns"

The ideology behind it is a reflection of wider right-wing forces that see managing dissent to the agenda of the liberals. This is why the wharfies have been singled out to be smashed. Traditionally, the wharfies have been at the for front of wider social campaigns and have showed strong support for workers in other industries.



the only ones...

Wharfies refused to ship uranium, would not load ships with armaments headed for Vietnam and showed active support for people fighting for democracy in Indonesia. And the fact that student organisations have actively protested against the Liberals higher education policy is one reason why they are in the firing line.

Freedom of Association?

Voluntary Student Unionism refers to the view that has been articulated since the mid and late 1970's that membership of student organisations should not be voluntary. That is, they believe that because of the requirement of institutions that students pay a fee for the use of certain amenities and services before being allowed to enrol and because the payment of that fee gives them automatic membership of the student organisation(s), that students are therefore being compelled to join the student organisation.

Why student organisations, the National Union of Students, the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee, the ALP,the Democrats, the Greens and numerous other bodies support universal membership is on a number of grounds.Firstly that student organisations are democratic bodies and governments should not interfere. That attacks on student organisations are politically motivated on the basis of opposing ideology to student organisations and the vast majority of students. That the fees collected by universities are more like local taxes, where services and representation are provided to everybody. In 1994 NUS obtained legal advice from a QC who stated that legally this was the case and that membership of student organisations was akin to paying local taxes or the like. This legal advice supports numerous legal cases - Clark v university of Melbourne (1 + 2), Kenmar v Monash University, Harradine v University of Adelaide - where each time universal membership was not found to be a contravention of freedom of association.

The sorry story for students in Victoria and WA was that VSU was introduced in these states in 1994, despite massive student protest and dissent. The differing legislations in each state has had various effects. In WA the student guilds are in crisis. Students are without funds to support and represent students. At Edith Cowan University the Guild is just about to close. This means there is no organised student body that can represent students to the University on appeals, protest about class sizes or develop policy on childcare or sexual harassment.

Students are the big losers. The only winners have been the Liberals who have begun to manage dissent to their policies on the WA campuses. Similarly in Victoria, some SRC's are in serious situations. In particular the Latrobe SRC. It is also no accident that this SRC and its elected representatives have been targeted as they were one of the most militant opponents of VSU and interference in SRCs by the university administration.

Well, it would be appear that the Liberals have been doing a lot of thinking and not much talking with students. NUS and the Student Union at UWS are in the process of stepping up the campaign against VSU. What is clear however, is that the Liberals are on the back foot over the dispute on the waterfront. The community does not want to stand for politically motivated attacks. A win for the Maritime Union, will make it that much harder for Howard and Kemp to introduce their politically motivated VSU legislation.

- Liz Humphrys,Researcher,UWS Students' Union

If you would like any more information please contact UWS Student Union - Marty, Brian or Liz on (02) 47 360 232

ABORTION

Passing of the Davenport Bill through the conservative dominated WESTERN AUSTRALIAN parliament was hailed as a victory by many pro - choice campaigners. However, after a closer examination of the new legislation, many women's groups argued that the laws are NOT AS 'LIBERAL' as has been claimed by their WA counterparts. The Women's Abortion Action Campaign (WAAC), are one such group, and in the following article provide a detailed comparison of the NEW PROVISIONS of the DAVENPORT BILL with previous legislation, highlighting several new barriers for women in accessing terminations.

What is the final version of the Davenport Bill? We are going to the trouble of reproducing the full text of the old provisions in the WA Criminal Code which related to abortion and the full text of the provisions in the Davenport Bill which have been added to the Criminal Code and to the WA Health Act 1911 so that, you, our readers,can fully understand the implications of the Davenport Bill for not only WA women but for all Australian women. We have found as we have written this that we keep finding new layers of meaning/implications from the Davenport Bill in its final form.

In its final form, the Davenport Bill proposes new Sections 199 and 259 of the WA Criminal Code which will relate to abortion. The old Sections 199,200, 201 and 259 (all of which related to abortion, but Section 259 was a more general provision and only partially and specifically related to abortion) have been repealed.

The old sections were as follows:

Attempts to procure abortion

199. Any person who with intent to procure the miscarriage of a woman,whether she is or is not with child, unlawfully administers to her or causes her to take any poison or other noxious thing, or uses any force of any kind, or uses any other means whatever, is guilty of a crime, and is liable to imprisonment for 14 years.

The like by women with child

200. Any woman who, with intent to procure her own miscarriage, whether she is or is not with child, unlawfully administers to herself any poison or other noxious thing, or uses any force of any kind, or uses any other means whatever, or permits any such thing or means to be administered or used to her, is guilty of a crime, and is liable to imprisonment for 7 years.

Supplying drugs or instruments to procure abortion

201. Any person who unlawfully supplies to or procures for any person anything whatever, knowing that it is intended to be unlawfully used to procure the miscarriage of a woman, whether she is or is not with child, is guilty of a misdemeanour, and is liable to imprisonment for 3 years.

New Section 199 is as follows:

Abortion

199. (1) It is unlawful to perform an abortion unless -

(a) the abortion is performed by a medical practitioner in good faith and with reasonable care and skill; and (b) the performance of the abortion is justified (our emphasis) under Section 334 of the Health Act 1911.

(2) A person who unlawfully performs an abortion is guilty of an offence - penalty $50,000.

(3) Subject to Section 259, if a person who is not a medical practitioner performs an abortion that person is guilty of a crime and is liable to imprisonment for 5 years.

(4) In this section -"medical practitioner" has the same meaning as it has in the Health Act 1911;

(5) A reference in this section to performing an abortion includes a reference to -

(a) attempting to perform an abortion; and

(b) doing any act with intent to procure an abortion,whether or not the woman concerned is pregnant.

New Section 199 of WA Criminal Code in part recognises the reality of the practice of abortion law in all states and territories. As can be seen by comparing the old provisions which have been repealed and the new provision which has been created, one of the key differences is the fact that no longer in WA can women be charged under the criminal statutes for "unlawfully administering to herself any poison or other noxious thing....."

Whilst this is, at first appearance, a gain for women in WA, when one considers that no woman has ever been

charged in any state or territory for having an abortion the repeal of this provision is merely a recognition of the reality of the practice of the law on abortion in Australia.

New Section 199 of WA Criminal Code in effect a bolster to the power of the medical profession over women's bodies and lives...Given that the new Section 199 of the WA Criminal Code specifies that, to be lawful, an abortion must be performed by a medical practitioner, this closes off, for example, the option of nurse practitioners such as midwives learning how to perform abortions. It is a very clear bolster to the power of the medical profession over the abortion operation and over the bodies and lives of WA women. There are echoes of the takeover of midwifery by doctors late last century in this new section in the WA Criminal Code.

It is noteworthy that the Section requires an abortion to be "justified", a word which so far has not appeared in any state/territory Crimes Act or Criminal Code in relation to abortion. Whilst the word "justified" appears in a context and relates to the consequential amendments made to the WA Health Act 1911 it's appearance in a Criminal Code cannot auger well for women in WA nor can it auger well for women in other states and territories.

New Section 199 also creates possibility for referral agencies and other services to be brought under the ambit of the Criminal Code.

The fifth sub-section of proposed new Section 199 of the Criminal Code specifies: "a reference in this section to performing an abortion includes a reference to - (a) attempting to perform an abortion; and (b) doing any act with intent to procure an abortion".

Can't you just see the anti-abortionists sitting around working out what those two little words "any act" can mean and, thereby, open up further ways they can attack WA women's access to abortion. Could "any act" mean publishing a pamphlet about where you can get an abortion? If yes, does this mean that any such pamphlet would have to be authorised by a "medical practitioner" given the consequential amendments proposed also by Davenport's Bill to the WA Health Act 1911? Could "any act" mean even the publishing of a political campaigning leaflet about abortion in WA? Only time will tell.....

What does proposed new Section 259 say?

The proposed new Section 259 of the WA Criminal Code reads as follows:

Surgical and medical treatment

259. A person is not criminally responsible for administering, in good faith and with reasonable care and skill, surgical or medical treatment -
(a) to another person for that other person's benefit; or (b) to an unborn child for the preservation of the mother's life,if the administration of the treatment is reasonable, having regard to the patient's state at the time and to all the circumstances of the case.

The key differences between old Section 259 and new Section 259 is in the layout and in the use of the word "administering" rather than "performing"; the use of the words "surgical or medical treatment "rather than "a surgical operation"; and the use of the words "to an unborn child" rather than "upon an unborn child".

When one considers that medical technology has advanced to the point where surgery can now be performed on a foetus whilst in utero the actual meaning of proposed new Section 259 may not be as intended. For example, can't you just imagine an anti-abortion activist sitting there thinking about how the words "surgical or medical treatment....to an unborn child" means just that, that is, performing surgery on a foetus to save the foetus at the expense of the woman possibly. And even though those words are followed by the words "for the preservation of the mother's life", to an anti-abortion activist who wants to stop abortions being performed at all costs, proposed new Section 259 provides them with fodder to hang hooks of attack upon.

Then, contradictorily, because proposed new Section 259 talks of "a person" not "a medical practitioner" it possibly offers a defence to anyone who "administers...surgical or medical treatment to an unborn child for the preservation of the mother's life"/performs an abortion, provided "administering" also means "performing".

If you're finding our analysis above & Section 259 confusing overall, join the club. WA politicians need to explain what it means or what they think it means. Maintenance of Section 259 appears to be in contradictionof the new Section 199, yet, we understand that it was never an option for Section 259 (in either its old or new form) to be repealed. The obvious question is why?

Davenport Bill also consists of consequential amendments to the WA Health Action 1911 - massive regulation and continued singling out of the abortion operation. Davenport's Bill also proposed consequential amendments to the WA Health Act 1911 to outline the circumstances in which an abortion is "justified" (there's that word again!)

Key provisions in the consequential amendments are:

"Any act..."

* again, the provision specifying that "a reference ...to performing an abortion includes a reference to....doing any act with intent to procure an abortion" is replicated in the Health Act. Given that those who oppose abortion will have a particular view about what "any act" means, what were WA politicians thinking of when they passed this provision?

A "justifiable" abortion...

* sub-section 3 of proposed new

Section 334 to the WA Health Act 1911 outlines four circumstances wherein an abortion is "justified" being: "the woman concerned has given informed consent; or the woman concerned will suffer serious personal, family or social consequences if the abortion is not performed; or serious danger to the physical or mental health of the woman concerned will result if the abortion is not performed; or the pregnancy of the woman concerned is causing serious danger to her physical
or mental health". Note the persistent use of the word "serious";

Informed consent

* sub-section 5 of new Section 334 to the WA Health Act 1911 defines what "informed consent" means and, just to give you an indication of the level of scrutiny women's decision making will be subject to we insert it in its entirety:

5. In this section - "informed consent" means consent freely given by the women where -
(a) a medical practitioner has properly, appropriately and adequately provided her with counselling about the medical risk of termination of pregnancy and of carrying a pregnancy to term"; (b) a medical practitioner has offered her the opportunity of referral to appropriate and adequate counselling about matters relating to termination of pregnancy and carrying a pregnancy to term; and (c) a medical practitioner has informed her that appropriate and adequate counselling will be available to her should she wish it upon termination of pregnancy or after carrying the pregnancy to term.

'Why is it that WA politicians have it in so much for young people?.. It (the new provision) permits a dependant minor to "apply to the Children's Court for an order..." Now can't you see all those 15 year old homeless young women who are seeking an abortion rushing to the WA Children's Court to get an order so that they don't have to tell their parents/legal guardian!"

Now can't you already hear the arguments which can be created over the meaning of the words "properly, appropriately and adequately"! Of great concern to us in Women's Abortion Action Campaign (WAAC) is the fact that the 'informed consent' provision constantly refers to the comparison between 'termination of pregnancy' and 'carrying a pregnancy to term'. This implies that women's judgement cannot be trusted. Instead we need to have explained to us, not just the risks and complications of the operation we have chosen to undergo, but rather our time needs to be filled with comparative data which, of course, must be provided "properly, appropriately and adequately".

Creation of a two-doctor hurdle...

* of great concern is the fact that sub-section 6 of proposed new Section 334 to the WA Health Act 1911 specifies that "a reference in sub-section (5) [that is, the sub-section above which defines "informed consent"] to a medical practitioner does not include a reference to: (a) the medical practitioner who performs the abortion; nor (b) any medical practitioner who assists in the performance of the abortion".

To put it in plain language, this is the introduction of a two doctor hurdle for all WA women who are trying to access abortion services. First, presumably, they will have to go to a local GP or a family planning doctor who is required by sub-section (5) to "properly, appropriately and adequately" explain various things and then, and only then, can you actually get to go to a clinic! OR, OR,OR clinics will have to employ a second/third doctor who sees the women when they first arrive at the clinic (and who must fulfil the requirements of sub-section (5) of new Section 334 of the WA Health Act 1911) and who does not perform the abortion and does not assist in the operation. Either way it will involve more costs and time for each WA woman who wants an abortion. If it is implemented in such a way that mainly GP's "properly, appropriately and adequately" explain various things to each woman seeking a termination, there may be a huge problem as many GP's are completely unfamiliar with the actual risks and complications of an abortion operation to say nothing of those who are out-and-out anti-abortion. This may well mean that abortion providers and allied health professionals in WA will need to establish their own training programme for GP's so that they can ensure this information is conveyed to women in a genuine information-sharing manner and not in a way which will scare women.

WAAC also has great concerns about this provision as it will place pressures on the Medicare system that it could well do without. WA women will now be required to not only claim from Medicare the item number for termination of pregnancy - they will also need to claim for their visit to a GP who will "properly, appropriately and adequately" explain various things as set out by sub-section (5). This will provide an avenue for attack against abortion being a refundable item under our universal health care system, Medicare, in the guise of 'we can't have these additional costs added to Medicare'.

A further implication of this provision is that the WA parliament is saying that abortion providing doctors cannot be trusted to provide the risks and complications information! If this was implemented across all surgical procedures you can imagine the strain put on not only Medicare but also on doctors. Imagine if you were having an operation like a breast implant, and it was required that the doctor who explains the risks and complications of the operation (up against the comparative data of no breast implant) has to be different from the doctor who

does the breast implant! [Come to think of it maybe this would have been a good requirement in the case of breast implants, given what is now known about them!] Returning to the point, why has the abortion operation been singled out in this way in the WA Health Act 1911?

Upper limit of 20 weeks of pregnancy and Ministerial approval of late term abortion facilities...

* the most vicious parts of the consequential amendments to the WA Health Act 1911 are kept to the end, the first being those contained in sub-section (7) which restricts "justifiable" abortions to the 20the week of pregnancy and, after that, two medical practitioners out of a panel of six have to approve a termination and it can only be if the woman or the foetus"has a severe medical condition"; of equal concern is the fact that performance of a late term abortion, if approved as above, can only be done"in a facility approved by the Minister for the purposes of this section". Ministerial approval of late term abortion facilities (rather than simply complying with any other day surgery legislation for example) should prove to be a mine field, especially if the Minister is known to be opposed to abortion!

Custodial parent of under 16's have to be informed and "given the opportunity to participate in counselling and in consultations....as to whether the abortion is to be performed"...

* the second vicious part of the consequential amendments to the WA Health Act are those which place restrictions on access for under 16 year olds. This sub-section reads as follows: (8) For the purposes of this section - (a) subject to subsection (11), a woman who is a dependant minor shall not be regarded as having given informed consent unless a custodial parent of the woman has been informed that the performance of an abortion is being considered and has been given the opportunity to participate in a counselling process and in consultations between the woman and her medical practitioner as to whether the abortion is to be performed. (b) a woman is a dependant minor if she has not reached the age of 16 years and is being supported by a custodial parent or parent; and (c) a reference to a parent includes a reference to a legal guardian.

This amounts to parental permission being required. Further, can you see a lot of young women opening up with a counsellor if mum or dad is present? Some under 16's will be alright about this but a lot won't. Why is it that WA politicians have it in so much for young people?The pollies must have been feeling a bit uncomfortable after they discussed the above provision so the next one was created just to assauge their guilty consciences! It permits a dependant minor to "apply to the Children's Court for an order that.....a custodial parent...should not be given the information and opportunity" referred to above. Now can't you see all those 15 year old homeless young women who are seeking an abortion rushing to the WA Children's Court to get an order so that they don't have to tell their parents/legal guardian!

As you can see from the above, the Davenport Bill in its new form has indeed "clarified" the law on abortion in WA, BUT it has also created prohibitions on access which were not there before and it has created even more opportunities than there were before for anti-abortionists to attack WA women's access to abortion. It is of note that politicians who started out saying they were "pro-choice" moved amendments to include the restrictive provisions in the Bill (the 20 week upper limit and the under 16's provision). The question remains why did they do the dirty work of the anti-abortion forces? There are a number of WA politicians who have a lot of explaining to do.

Already the anti-abortion groups in Western Australia would have their legal people pouring over the new version of the Davenport Bill seeking to find clauses to exploit so to further restrict access. And haven't the WA pollies handed them a lot of opportunities with the use of words like "any act" or "properly, appropriately and adequately" or "justified".

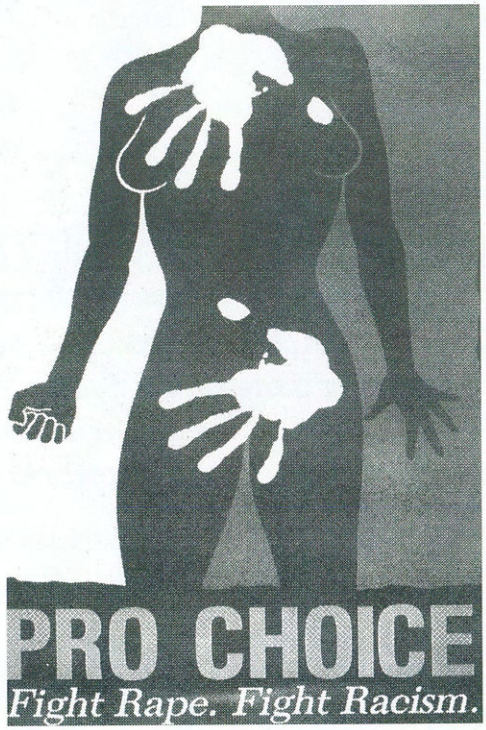
Anti-abortion politician from WA, Phillip Pendal (an Independent) is quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald on 22/5/98 as saying "over time, the legislation would become a framework to implement greater restrictions". Abortion rights activists in every other state and territory will need to be ever vigilant now to ensure that versions of the Davenport Bill are not introduced. We cannot agree that imposing prohibitions on access for late term abortion and for under 16's and the creation of a two doctor hurdle can be described in any shape or form as a 'liberalisation'.

"Anti-abortion politician from WA, Phillip Pendal (an Independent) is quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 22/5/98 as saying "over time, the legislation would become a framework to implement greater restrictions". "

The Western Australian abortion debate highlighted the fact that racism is still very much enshrined in our culture, and that more needs to be done by feminists to expose the racism that is apparent in our society.VANESSA BOSNJACK,Women's Officer for the National Union of Students (NSW), looks at the racial implications of what happened in WA...

A feminist analysis of abortion incorporates the various factors and experiences that effect woman's lives. Issues such as a woman's culture, class, sexuality, ability, and religion need to be addressed for the abortion campaign to have a strong feminist analysis. When we view the abortion debate of WA in 1998, we find that there were quite a few issues that were not addressed or were pushed aside in the race to 'clarify' the laws in WA.

In 1996 a young boy reported in 'news time' at his school that his mother had taken her aborted foetus home with the intent of burying it, in accordance with Maori culture. The school notified the relevant authority. Police interviewed the woman and confiscated the foetus for evidence. Much of 1997 was spent working out who the police could charge, and by February 3rd 1998, the police announced that they would be charging the two doctors that performed the abortion, Dr Victor Chan and Dr Hoh Peng Lee, under s199 of the WA Criminal Code.



The charging of the two doctors led to a high level of activism amongst pro-abortion campaigners. Rallies were organised in defence of a woman's right to choose whether or not to have an abortion, and in defence of the two doctors that were to be charged. Abortion activist networks around the country organised an national weekend of action on April 25/27 in support of Western Australian women.

Debates around a woman's right to choose were the focal points of many feminist and women's groups both on and off campus. But what was actually being discussed in these forums? Were women discussing methods of incorporating a feminist analysis in the abortion campaign, or were they reacting to the circumstances that they were finding themselves in.

Issues that are becoming more apparent as the abortion debate leaves the public sphere are the length of time that it took the Director of Public Prosecutions to get the papers together to charge the two doctors under the s199 of the Criminal Code and the way in which the woman's cultural requests were dealt with by the DPP.

The DPP took a year of investigating the case to establish who they could charge and with what. This involved the prying into of peoples lives, and then in February this year the DPP announced that he would be charging Dr Victor Chan and Dr Hoh peng Lee for an abortion that they performed in 1996, under s199 of the WA Criminal Code. (Most of 1997 was spent looking through the Criminal Codes for grounds to lay charges on the two doctors). It was not until late April that the two doctors were formally charged, as it took the DPP several months to get the correct paper work together to charge the doctors, ie from early this year to late April. Even without being formally charged, the doctors were still taken to the police station for questioning and for quite some time, it was unclear to activists in other states what was actually going on with the charging of the two doctors. This raises several questions about the way in which the case was dealt with, and especially the way in which the DPP acted towards the case. The charging of anyone should be done in a manner that allows the person to know exactly what is going on, what they are being charged for and all of the processes involved in their case.

Did the race of the two doctors have an impact on how the two doctors were treated by the DPP and how the charging procedures were dealt with in such a complacent manner? What does the treatment of the two doctors mean in terms of the right to unprejudiced dealings of a case? How was this issue taken up by abortion activists? Were these issues taken up and incorporated in the abortion campaign in both WA and the rest of the country?

The ways in which the laws are carried out in society are racist. We only need to look to the percentage of indigenous people in our prisons; what reasons they are imprisoned for; the ways in which they are treated; and our history of aboriginal deaths in custody, to realise that our legal institutions are racist. The driving force behind the charging of the two doctors was that they had procured an 'illegal' abortion. Yet during all the hype, a white male doctor publicly stated that with a strict reading of the Criminal Code, 90% of all of the abortions he had performed were illegal. I am by no means advocating that this doctor be arrested or that legal charges be brought against him, but rather exposing the hypocrisy of the witch hunt against Chan & Lee.

The abortion campaign focused little attention on the fact that the woman's foetus was taken

away for evidence, without her cultural requests being taken into consideration. This was largely a result of inadequate communication mechanisms enabling women nationally to communicate at length with one another. (Even with e-mail technology) The woman had requested that she be allowed to bury the foetus in accordance with her tradition, but this still has not happened since the foetus has been confiscated. It's time that our laws were looked at so that they could take into account the differing cultural needs of people, rather than the laws being a sacred document which were introduced by white people for the benefit of white people.

personal stories

One of my earliest memories is of standing outside an abortion clinic in my home town, while my mother and other church going folk prayed loudly. I remember being quite confused about what was going on, and I felt rather embarrassed that we were praying in the streets. At least one young woman left the clinic while we were praying, and walked past us quickly, her eyes averted from the small group on the pavement. My mother and her friends did not say anything to the young women, but I know that my mother was praying that the women would change her mind and not terminate the life of her unborn baby.

Pro-life functions were nothing unusual in my early childhood. One of the social events of the year for my family was the annual Right to Life picnic, which drew quite large crowds to gather in a park near my not-so-large town. I looked forward to the event for the BBQ, the free rides and the face painting. One year the theme was a Teddy Bear's picnic, and we took our favourite bears to enter into the competition for the Cutest Bear, Oldest Bear or Best Dressed Bear.

From an early age, my values were shaped by my very Catholic environment and I was against abortion without really even thinking about it. I loved my mother and to her, killing an unborn baby was something she passionately opposed. My political upbringing was very strongly influenced by my mother. She is a very political woman, who works very hard for her beliefs. She is a dedicated Catholic and holds co-ordinating positions in several conservative family-values based groups, including the Right to life. During the Year of the Family in the eighties, our home was a central place for activism of a 'pro-life' and 'pro-family' nature.

When I was in early high school, we were shown a video in religion called 'The Silent Scream' which aimed to show abortion as a horrifying crime - and it succeeded. I came out of that class absolutely traumatised, convinced that abortion was wrong and that it should be against the law.

As I grew older, I began to take more into account when I thought about the abortion issue. I realised that it wasn't just about the termination of life, it was also about the lives of women who made decisions about whether they wanted to bear a child. I realised that women who had abortions were not selfish murderers. They were women in all walks of life who fell pregnant accidentally, or against their will, and who decided that it would not be good for their lives, or the lives of a potential child if the pregnancy came to term.

I came to feel quite angry about the role I had unknowingly played as a young child, standing outside the abortion clinic, holding my mother's hand. Infants are so often used by pro-lifers to justify their arguments, to give emotional impact to their beliefs. "See, here is my child, I love her, I didn't kill her." But just because I was a planned birth, born into a stable family of love, care and relative affluence, didn't mean that all situations were like that. I often think that this in fact is overlooked by those campaigning against abortion.

As a young adult, I have developed a very firm pro-choice stance, and believe that it is important for women to have the freedom and support to choose to have children or not. Sadly, these beliefs have placed a rift between me and my mum, because she cannot reconcile my beliefs. Although we still love each other, it pains her that I believe that women should have free, safe abortions on demand.

'As a result of my upbringing, I have first hand experience of both sides of the abortion debate, and thus have quite an understanding of the struggle involved for women to gain reproductive freedom.'

As a result of my up bringing, I have first hand experience of both sides of the abortion debate, and thus have quite an understanding of the struggle involved for women to gain reproductive freedom. I know that people who argue against abortion are not all uncaring, fanatical zealots who want to inhibit women's freedom. My mother is one of the most tender, kind hearted people I have ever met, and she genuinely believes that women should have the same opportunities and rights as men. It scares me that I can't write her off as an 'enemy', nor will I ever convince her to reconsider her views on abortion.

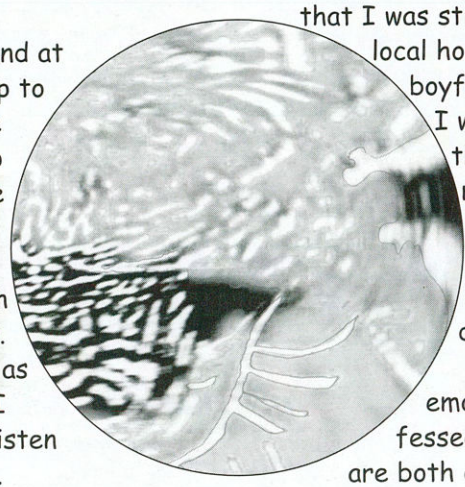
Despite this, I am firmly convinced that it should not be up to the likes of my mother, or the uncaring fundamentalist zealot to decide what I can or can't do with my body. For even though my mother may believe in the rights of women to equal pay, equality before the law and a life without rape and violence, if a woman does not have reproductive freedom, she is still living a life of oppression.

Jacinta Toomey, University of Queensland

A Story of (de)termination

I remember the day I found out I was pregnant. It all seemed a bit surreal, even though the doctor was telling me the facts. Naively I thought that I couldn't get pregnant. I had been having unprotected sex for the previous eighteen months and had not fallen pregnant. I also had been taking so many drugs that I believed my body couldn't hold a fertilised egg.

My first thought was one of fear and confusion - how could this happen to me? I knew immediately that I did not want to have a baby. (One of my friends had recently given up her baby for permanent foster care) The doctor realised I didn't want to continue with the pregnancy and freely gave me information about how to obtain a termination. An appointment was made for an ultrasound and then a visit to a clinic up at Tweed Heads.



I remember telling my boyfriend at the time. He said the decision was up to me. I knew that he didn't really care about me. It was more a relationship of convenience - I had no where else to go and he had no one else to fuck- His family were relieved that I was getting a termination, although no one was allowed to tell his father. I didn't tell my parents immediately as I was too scared and embarrassed. I didn't feel like having to explain or listen to their well-meaning chastisements.

The day came for the trip to the clinic, it took about two hours to get there by car. I was relieved that my boyfriend was coming with me although I think he had to be persuaded. When we arrived at the clinic he was told to come back in a few hours and left. I was taken inside given an initial counselling session and examination. I was questioned about my reasons for wanting a termination and it was explained to me that I could change my mind.

I was dressed in a pretty nightgown, given a walkman and a choice of music to listen to. The procedure was relatively quick. I was taken into the surgery room and assisted to the bed. My legs were put up in stirrups and a local anaesthetic was injected into my cervix and vaginal area. The same instrument that is used for a pap smear was inserted. The sound of the sucking machine frightened me and could still be heard through the music now blasting through my head phones. I remember feeling very overwhelmed at this point, I remember staring to cry and wishing that it was all over. The sound of the machine seemed to go on for an eternity.

Finally I was taken to a recovery room where I was given panadol and a hot water bottle. I was told that I might get some stomach cramping and to rest for a while, there were other women on beds in the room, although I don't remember talking to them. My boyfriend was allowed in to see me and I decided that I just wanted to leave straight away. They told me that I should rest a bit longer, but I refused. I got dressed and left. We drove home, my boyfriend seemed happy that it was now all sorted out. I was still out of it from the drugs and felt relieved that it was over. But still my heart is heavy. I just wanted to remain numb for as long as possible.

I recover

I was told to expect a bit of bleeding for about a week. After two weeks of heavy bleeding I returned to the doctors. I had a test only to find out that I was still pregnant. I was admitted to the local hospital for a curette. I knew my boyfriend was out and about raging while I was in hospital. I reassured myself that I made the right decision I told myself that I would have made a really bad mother. I didn't like myself, I had low self-esteem, no money, a bad relationship, and all I did was take heaps of drugs.

Again I was overwhelmed with emotion. I rung my parents and confessed what I had done. Naturally they are both disappointed and worried. My brother made a mammoth eight-hour journey to bring me a bunch of flowers and check that I was all right.

I recover.

It has been eighteen years since I had the termination. I now have three beautiful children who I love and who bring me much joy. My life is very different now, I have control and I like myself a lot more. I try not to dwell on memories from the past but these experiences do not leave you. Even though it has been a long time since the termination I can still remember.r I sometimes wonder what my life would have been like if I had actually had the child. Was it a boy or a girl? I have been through all the 'what ifs' and the guilt trips...I have no doubt in my mind that I made the right decision at the time, and feel lucky that I actually had an option. I realise now that continuing the relationship with the loser I was then going out with would have been disastrous.

Now I refuse to scar myself with guilt

I recover.

WHY 'WOMENS' HEALTH CENTRES

Calls for male specific health services often throws into question the need for women's health services. But are the cries of inequity over public spending on male health care about addressing inadequacies in Australia's health system, or reducing a woman's access to health care? PENRITH WOMEN'S HEALTH CENTRE see the current debate over expenditure on women's services as a backlash to the women's movement. Workers at the Centre take up the debate.....

For over thirty years now, women have organised and struggled to improve our lot. We have gone through the very painful process of redefining what it means to be a woman as well as battling our way upstream in a society intent on keeping those changes from happening. As a result of all this, we have made some gains. Now we are being asked to feel guilty and responsible for others not having these same gains....the men, who have done little, if any, of this painful questioning and defining.

The meagre amount of government moneys that have gone into women's services are now threatened because the talk is NOT manifesting more money for men's health centres but splitting up the already scarce money available.

Noises are being made that our battle is won. It is far from won. All of the following issues that faced women thirty years ago are still being experienced by the vast majority of women in our society. Thirty years is a spit in the ocean when it comes to making lasting social change around gender issues. There is every need for the struggle to continue.

The natural phases of women's reproduction are still often treated more as an illness and women have become socialised into believing this as truth. However when women do report problems to a largely male medical profession they often find themselves being trivialized. While other health problems such as endometriosis and PMS are often not recognised at all or labelled neurotic by male doctors.

The majority of older people in Australia are women and it will become increasingly more so. It is important to avoid equating ageing with infirmity or menopause with illness but this is often the attitude of the medical system. While the push for Hormone Replacement Therapy, HRT, (with all it's related side affects) is making billions of dollars for the drug companies there is little emphasis anywhere on alternative approaches to treat any negative symptoms of menopause. Many women may hesitate or delay using the mainstream health care system because of all these factors . These hesitations can be even more pronounced for lesbians who face homophobia and ignorance around their specific health care needs.

The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well being - not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. This definition recognizes that a holistic intergration of all aspects of one's life is needed to determine the health and well-being of individuals. Furthermore, it directly implies that all forms of disadvantage impact on health and well-being.

Women in our society are significantly disadvantaged through sex-role stereotyping, economic oppression and as the targets of massive amount of violence (sexual assault, physical/emotional assault, incest) These issues impact on women's health enormously and in every way: physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

Government policy has only just begun to recognise these social issues for women. This is indicitive of women's under - represenation in the decision making bodies of government. For over twenty years the women's movement and women's health centres have been addressing these social/health issues for women and have been instrumental in demanding that governments place them on the agenda.

Generally, women's health centres and women's services are fine tuned in advocating and addressing the holistic health needs of women. The services also target specific groups, which is widely recognised as highly effective in providing appropriate social/health care.

IT HAS BEEN ABUNDANTLY CLEAR OVER HISTORY THAT IF WOMEN DO NOT TAKE UP THEIR OWN FIGHT, NO ONE ELSE WILL!

Penrith Women's Health Centre provides all our services for women by women : counselling, massage, acupuncture, medical clinic, legal advice, childcare, library, support groups for domestic violence, breast cancer, social group for lesbians, workshops in areas such as confidence/assertiveness, body image, relationships, relaxation, anger and lots more. We are active in the community addressing access and equity for marginalised groups and promoting change in social attitudes towards women.

Penrith Women's Health Centre aims to provide the extensive range of services in a relaxed, empowering and open atmosphere. We also aim to not only provide services for all women within society but also endeavour to incorporate different strategies for service delivery to make us accessible to women from different backgrounds and experiences. To find out more about our Centre, or to book appointments, call - **02 47218749.**

It's another Saturday night and you're hot and ready to hit the singles scene again. ***A few friends a few drinks and an air of nonchalance is what you need to find that someone that can make you buzz. It doesn't matter whether you want it for just one night, or something a little more permanent, it seems most people out there are looking for something. And there are many tricks to the trade that are tried and tested (and rejected) that swirl in the murky waters of trying to find that mate in life. Here are a few scenarios.***

You've done it before and you'll do it again

By Katerina Tahija

The Look At Me Challenge

(or fuck I'm an idiot)

You're walking to the bus stop in your usual trance like enthusiasm when you simultaneously notice two things. One is that your bus is about to leave the bus stop and two the object of your lust (well at least for the past 2 weeks) is on it. The last time you ran was in the primary school compulsory class races, but these are desperate times so you start pumping those legs. Clutching your Freudian psychology and Chemistry Today textbooks (you are actually a humanities student but the books are good conversation starters), you sprint with all your might to catch that bus with all your lust, ego and essay schedules on the line, smiling, looking sexy and sure you will grab lots of good attention. Instead, you lose you left shoe, you fling your psychology book into the windscreen of a passing Mac truck, all your body organs are threatening to shut down and you hear someone call out ' call an ambulance, she is about to fit'. The worst thing is the bus is terminating at this stop, it's a Saturday and you don't even have uni, and that gorgeous, amazing person that you so admired is laughing so hard as they step over you slumped body that she/he (circle relevant gender) does not even realise it was all for them. At least no one can tell that you are crying as you imitate a sweating Wentworth Falls. Ho-hum……

Gee I think I'm Sexy

(or I just finished my 23rd vodka)

You weren't sure whether you wanted to go out, but now your glad you're here. All your tension is gone and you are just having the best time. You are a whiz with words tonight as it seems no matter what you are saying, everyone at the Swamp Bar is laughing hysterically at your witty humour. You felt especially awkward earlier as that really good-looking chic/guy (again your choice) that is in your Tuesday lecture is at the uni bar and looking particularly hot. But after a few drinks you feel fine and you know you look astronomically sexy; you even had that hazy blurred 1930's movie star look when you just looked in the bathroom mirror. You start smiling seductively in her/his direction, licking your lips just slightly to get that moist look (unfortunately, you missed the 'hey camel tongue' comments your drinking comrades were directing to you). You start hiccupping but convince yourself it is in rhythm to Wham's *Wake me up before you go-go* (it's an '80's night at the Swamp Bar). And then the song comes on; Madonna's Like a Virgin. You and you bestest friend squeal and giggle in reminiscent 14 year old girlish fashion (in reality, 8 schooner glasses in the vicinity exploded from the high-pitched shrieks) and you drag what's her name to the dance floor, all the while whispering it's been a long time since you were a virgin (everyone from Katoomba to Mt Druit heard as well, but they already knew). After wriggling around the dance floor with sensual rhythm (it's funny that the bouncer kept trying to dance with you), you sidle on over to the bar where your love is standing. Unfortunately, as you push through the hot crowd, you start to feel a little light-headed and as you reach your destination you deliver a perfect rendition of the Vindaloo curry, extra hot, and rice you had for dinner

Was it good for you

(or I can smell sex so I must of done something exciting)

in a steaming aromatic pile, slightly reconfigured, at your would be lover's feet (and some on their legs). It's lucky you had planned to change to Wednesday's class.

The tough time is over and now you're into the fun part of going back to her/his (or who ever) place, a short stumble from Panthers. You notice the Indian cookbook nestling on top of the Freudian psychology text, opened on the Vindaloo recipe page. You're impressed. You step over the piles of unfolding clothes sculptures and as soon as you step into the bedroom, both of you unfurl you bottled emotions into a passionate struggle of wild exotic lovemaking (that's how you chipped your tooth).

You start to sigh and moan with ecstasy, just practicing until she/he can actually manage to take your clothes off. You both start wriggling and gyrating around on the bed and you just hope that smell is coming from the glowing fishbowl with it's friendly floating inhabitants. As you try and connect mind with physical sensations, you start to yell 'yes, yes' only to realise that they must have gone to the toilet and that you are momentarily alone in the room. You start to wriggle seductively until your lover needs to untangle you from the leopard print sheets that you have somehow managed to wrap around you tighter than the Liberal governments spending on welfare. Once you regain consciousness, you both start to touch and kiss and bite and nibble and stroke and explore and poke and squeeze and squash and rub and wrestle and pant and moan and pant and moan and pant and moan until you both reach that special place, almost there, almost there. You wake up in the morning with your hands between each others legs, kinda stuck there, you mumble that you didn't quite catch how they spelt their name, it was nice to meet them and hope that you will see them soon. You then move forward as if violently pushed from behind to connect your lips with some part of their face as a show of shared intimacy then head for the door. You just hope that the reason the place looks so familiar is because so many student houses look alike……

HE STROLLED SLOWLY TOWARDS ME, HIS EYES NEVER LEAVING MINE... A BIG, GRIMY HULK OF A MAN...
HI, JOE, LONG TIME NO-- HEYYY, JOEY!
WHAT SHALL I DO? HE'S COMING OVER TO ME... AND I...I CAN'T MOVE!

M is for masturbate

Tales of the nasty " M " word have been handed down from generation to generation. Most of them involving perverts, sluts, deviants, and those with a sordid past. And the case of the local flasher who hangs around public toilets and parks is still a popular one. So basically any man in a long black trencher is a possible culprit of this so - called filthy past time.

It would be more appropriate to refer the " M " to mature audiences because masturbation is a totally natural act. Masturbation can be seen as a movie about pleasure where one woman embarks on a holistic journey to freedom. Stripping off society's conditioning, she learns to love her sexual self through a creative confrontation between finger and flesh. However, while masturbation does not require Parental Guidance (PG), people's responses to this timeless classic is still geared towards the negative. I wonder what Bill ' Mr Movies ' Collins would think?

Masturbation will always be considered dirty, immoral, pornographic, lewd and indecent as long as babies are born into these negative ideas. And then there are the laughable myths that doing the deed will send you blind, give you hairy palms and -wait for it- you'll get 'The Fever'. These unfortunate adjustments to the 'birds and the bees' talk has forced people into the closet to touch themselves with the shame and guilt constantly at the back of their minds. But if it's pleasure we feel from touching ourselves, it seems morality needs to be revisited with an open and liberated approach.

According to Cathy Winks and Anne Semans, authors of The Good Vibrations Guide to Sex (Cleis Press, $32.95), masturbation should be the national past time. While it happens on a less celebrated note, most people would not even admit to doing 'it'. Winks and Semans are self-labelling masturbationists. They believe masturbation is great because: " It feels good; it's healthy; it's natural it's free; it's legal; it's your birthright; it's easy to do; it's convenient; it's voluntary; you can do it alone; you can do it with someone (called mutual masturbation); it's educational; it's a unique form of self expression; it builds self-esteem; it's creative..." And the list goes on. It can really mean anything you want it to mean. And that's the beauty of 'M' movies, you're the star and you say what goes!

It's Totally Natural

As toddlers we are faced with the force of a pointed finger and a stern voice mouthing 'dirty' when curious hands wonder. We itch yet are told not to scratch.... unless in the toilet. And as the mind and body mature, the dreaded myth plagues us like the looming birds'n'bees spiel. Then confusion sets in. Masturbation feels good, it's relaxing, it's arousing and helps us sleep at night, but at the same time it's a big no-no. And even more so for woman. Men have the excuse that they're rearranging their balls for comfort. We have no socially acceptable comeback, it seems. And furthermore, it's only done by people who are having sex. But that's not spoken about in a society that is so afraid to talk about sex for fear of promoting it. Masturbation, scratching, fondling (or whatever you call it) is totally natural. And it can bring orgasm if so desired.

It's Totally Safe

Masturbation is sex. It's safe sex. It's an ideal form of safe sex with a partner or partners. It can bring you warmth, closeness, love, eroticism, pleasure, excitement, passion and orgasms - everything penetrative and high-risk sexual activities can. It feels good all the time, regardless of what time of the month it is. Masturbation during menstruation can be seen as a time for focusing on your womanhood, while striking the very area of the female anatomy which you got here. That can be a very powerful and wonderful feeling. Masturbation is also great for pregnant women and people whose physical capabilities are limited.

It's About Creativity and Enjoying your Sexual Freedom

By masturbating, either by yourself or with a partner, you are rebelling against the myths and morality enforced by society. You are also expressing your right to freedom of sexual expression. That is, you are making choices about how you gain sexual pleasure. And you are ignoring people's negative attitudes to masturbation even though they are closet masturbationists themselves. It's also a great way of exploring your sexual creativity. You can do it in front of a mirror, with your clothes on or off, in bed, in front of the TV, at the drive-in, under the table at your favourite restaurant, basically anywhere you want.

Masturbation will mean different things for different people, and this diversity depends on what sensations you want to feel and who you want to share them with. But, most importantly, masturbation is about giving you control over your own body. Playing with yourself can mean satisfaction on your demand, getting in touch with your body's senses, not having to buy a dildo, a way to relax, a means for falling asleep peacefully, or not having to deal with partners without protection. Just remember, mutual masturbation with your clothes on is safer than being caught with your pants down.

Thanx to 'Velocity Girl' Mag, from the Warehouse Youth Health Centre, Penrith

NEW VANILLA

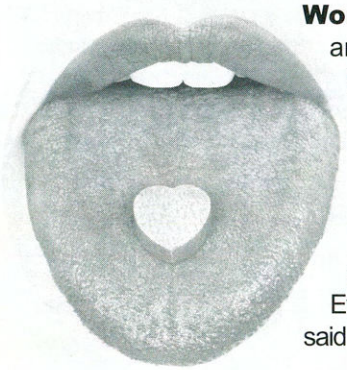
IS THERE ANY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 'EROTICA' AND 'PORNOGRAPHY'...DO WOMEN USE PORN? To find some answers enter the world of SEX FM, where behind the mic you will find DR LOVE & NURSE NANCY. They're the creation of Lee Redfern and Cathy Albury, whose radio drama, 'New Vanilla Era' takes a look all that R, X & now NVE (non - violent erotica) related. Here's a snippet from the script of Program One - 'Pornography for Beginners'

Cast:
6 women: 2 sexperts – Dr. Love & Nurse Nancy
Woman 1, also the BBC Woman
Woman 2, also the Concerned Mum
Woman 3, also the Woman Who Knows Everything
Woman 4, also the Perky Infotainment Woman
1 man: the Pumpkin Rock Jock
Setting: In and out of the studio of SEX FM

DJ: And that was 'Three times a Lady'....and coming up on tonight's show with Dr. Love;'What is pornography for?" Dr. Love, she's got all the answers.

What is pornography?

Woman 1: Dirty pictures
Woman 2: Degrading to women
Woman 3: Sexy films...videos
Woman 4: Secret men's business
Woman 1: No, I wouldn't ban it, it just doesn't turn me on.....
Woman 2: Well no, women don't like it
Dr Love:(Interviewer) So what's the difference between pornography and erotica?
Woman 2: Erotica is more tasteful, a bit arty usually, not as graphic
woman 3...with erotica, women have more control
Woman 4: Well, when it's normal, you know, when it's normal, not any of that kinky stuff....
Dr Love: (Interviewer) So what is normal?
Woman 3: You know, straight sex
Dr. Love: What missionary position?
Woman 2: Nice, romantic sex...
Woman 1: Oh, a little bit bondage is alright, nothing heavy
Woman 4: Look, as long as it's natural
Woman 3: As long as it's normal
Woman 2: Oh, maybe a bit of shaving
Woman 1: Fetishes? Oh no, they shouldn't ban feet, like they shouldn't ban stuff like that, it's harmless fun
Woman 4: Porn is to get people off
Woman 3: So is erotica. It's just that one tries to be art mate



Woman 1: Oh, erotica is aright, you know for women, by women
Woman 4: What I like is erotica...what you like is pornography, simple as that.
Woman 2: I was an anti – pornography feminist. Everything the anti-porn feminists said made sense to me...It wasn't that the movies were dirty and explicit, no.... Pornography always insults either my intelligence, my political sensibilities, or my sense of the erotic. No one ever said, "How many movies have you seen?"

Theorising pornography

One of those women who knows everything: If you were all set to see some girl – on – girl, and I showed you a toe – sucking video, you'd feel ripped off. Even within your favourite porno genre, there's going to be the exact thing you like, and lots of things you don't like. Say you tell me you want to read a detective story, and so I buy an Agatha Christie. If you were thinking of James Elroy, you'll be very dissapointed...same with porn. That's why they have those four hour porno compilation videos...You're not watching the same cum – shot again and again, you're watching four hours of different cum – shots, waiting for the hot one, the one that fits your inner movie.....
Pumpkin rock DJ: Because it is less specific less suggestive of sexual activity, "erotica" is regularly used as an euphemism for "classy porn" Pornography expressed in literary language or expensive photography and consumed by the upper middle class is 'erotic', the cheap stuff, which can't pretend any purpose but getting people off, is smut. The erotica – versus – porn approach evades the (the embarrassing) question of how porn is used.
Woman 2:Deconstruction porn makes for interesting mental masturbation, but it can't hold a candle to the old fashioned kind
BBC Art Critic: Is this the real problem pornography? That we might masturbate with it? Is the pillorising of pornography a hangover from the past – from the belief that masturbation is evil?...And if it's not about masturbation, what else are we supposed to do with porn. On another level pornography confuses the issue of "the gaze". If we look at sensual art, we know we are supposed to look at it. And if we happen to have a sexy dream of fantasy that night, so be it – we don't talk about it. What do we talk about is the position of theviewer – sometimes, an artist will deliberately make us question how we are supposed to look at art. In the gallery, we ask the ques-

tion, are we empathetic or voyeuristic? When we use porn – there is no ambivalence – we are definitely voyeuristic and most empathetic.

Perky Infotainment Woman: When I found my boyfriend reading porn, I was annoyed, in a way I couldn't quite define. Hey, I'm a hip happening 90's kinda woman. I'm certainly not anti – sex. And it wasn't hard core, for goodness sake, it was ***Playboy***. So why was I so disturbed... was I being unreasonable to ask him not to have it?

Rock Jock: And tonites question with Dr Love, **'Why do women hate pornography?'** Guys, is your lady Jealous of your solo work – give us a call. Come on girls – ring in and tell us your side of the story – Dr. Love she's got the answer

Woman 2: It's different for women. Women don't get off on pornography in the same way. In fact most women hate porn.

Woman 4: Do women hate porn?

Woman 3: I don't think you can talk about all pornography, much less all women

Woman 1: Pornography is degrading to women

Woman 4: Well, men are more into porn than women, really because they're more visual, they need to look

Woman 2: I'm against porn because...it's embarrassing

Woman 1: It's violence against women – porn is theory and rape in practice...

Woman 4: What's the big deal? Everything I see is sexist? Why should I expect sex to be any different?

The woman who knows everything: (on a caffine buzz)The way some people talk about porn, you know they musn't have ever seen much of it. You know, I read all these feminist anti – porn, porn is violence things before I really ever saw any porn, and when I saw it, I thought - my God, is that it? – It's so tame! There's this image that porn is all about violence, but try and find violent porn in this city...Seriously, good luck to you! You'll get a few good outfits, some oral sex, straight intercourse, maybe anal – that's extreme.

Woman 1: Anal sex is disgusting

Woman 2 : Look pornography is just unrealistic and exploitative

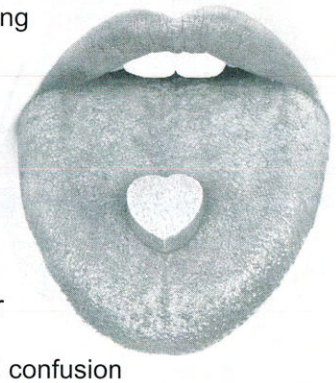
Woman 4: Then who are all the women going into porn shops? Who are all these women watching porn?

Woman 3: I think a lot of women go in with their partners...

Woman 1: So does that make them dupes, or just sluts.....

Woman 2: Yes the real reason why I hated ***Playboy*** is that the models established a standard I could never attain without the help of implants, a personal trainer, soft lighting, air brushing and a squad of make up artists and hairdressers. It's a standard that equates my sexuality with youth and unattainable beauty. I didn't want my boyfriend buying ***Playboy's*** definition of beauty because I was never going to look like one of those girls.

The Woman who knows Everything; So would you feel better if your boyfriend was jerking off over Cleo?



Dr Love: And you're listening to Dr. Love. If you've just tuned in, we're talking pornography and erotica, and to help us decipher the difference, we're joined by our guest sexpert, Nurse Nancy. Welcome!

Nurse Nancy: Thanks, Dr Love...

Dr Love: So, if there is still confusion over the difference between porn and erotica, how can we tell the difference?

Nurse Nancy: Well, that's a good question. One good way to tell is by using Federal Classification Laws. If a film is X-Rated, we know it's porn. If it's R, then it's simply erotic. But just to confuse things – in R – Rated movies you can show sexual violence and sexual assault, but in an X Rated film, all their sex has to be consensual. That's the law.

Dr Love:Let me get this straight – if sex in X Rated films already has to be consensual and non – violent, why are we talking about changing the X classification to Non- Violent Erotica – or NVE as it's being called?

Nurse Nancy: Mmm, the 'New Vanilla Era', as it's being described in the Gay press. Partly that comes from the porn lobby. They want to describe films more accurately. But, as part of the NVE re-classification, certain sexual practices, which are okay in X now, would be banned. And my question is, are these practices really violent? – what are we really banning?

Dr. Love: So lets not be coy , what practices are we talking about?

Nurse Nancy:Of course we don't know for sure...It appears (cause we don't know yet) what's been described as mild fetishism will be banned. So that might be things like – toe sucking, spanking, maybe dressing in rubber or leather, tying people up – even if they're consenting. Remember it's not illegal to do any of these things...Some people are saying NVE will be tougher on gay and lesbian porn, because the type of people who want to ban things would tend, and this is a generalisation, to think gay and lesbian sex, is somehow kinkier. But of course, there's a hell lot of kinky heterosexual porn, so there will be a flow on effect. They're not banning what you might call 'gay and lesbian sex'. They're not banning the people having sex, they are banning particular sexual practices.

'NEW VANILLA ERA' WAS PRODUCED BY AND FOR ABC RADIO NATIONAL'S 'RADIO EYE ' PROGRAM

Cathy Albury is a Post Grad student at UNSW

Sex, Love and Star-bound Positions (M rated)
A light-hearted look at the zodiac (comments may offend some)

by Madam Zelda

CANCER

You are sentimental, mysterious and dreamy. You are very in touch with the moon and often strive to take your sexual experiences to the lunar heights. Like the changing cycles, you can be moody, fretful and sensitive. For you, sex and love go together, and one without the other is something you really go in for. You have major bisexual tendencies, but that goes with your artistic sense of humour. You are a 'home is where the heart is' kinda gal, and you tend to like a homely environment. But you also need the space to shake your thing when you have to. You are most like to have secret affairs but this does not shake your commitment but gives your mysterious ways variety. Song: Amy Stewart *Knock on Wood*

TAURUS

You are a sensual, affectionate and self-indulgent woman who loves the finer things in life. You believe in true love. This could also mean you get possessive, self-righteous and jealous when challenged. You are the earth goddess, well-rooted and a very sexual being. You often use sex to get what you want without realising it. You often think you know it all, and even when wrong, you will claim that you knew you were wrong. You are a lover that has great passion and stamina and would do it all day and night if the person were right. You believe in commitment and love, regardless of gender. You sexy thing you! Song: Janis Joplin *Take Another Piece of my Heart*

ARIES

You are a highly motivated woman that loves a challenge. But you can get easily bored and will go hunting for excitement. You are expressive, vibrant and a risk-taker, which sometimes means impulsive, extroverted and selfish. You are the kind of lover that promises a big show, gets in first and then when satisfied rolls over and goes go to sleep- unless you want more. You are an aggressive lover who would most enjoy S&M and will want to try most things (unless there are legal ramifications). Go forth and dominate. Song: Blondie *Heart of Glass*

LEO

You are amorous, stylish and romantic with a fiery appetite for socially indulgent endeavours. You have a tendency to demand the limelight in your typical theatrical way. If you don't get full adoring attention from your lovers (one is usually not enough), then you sweep of elsewhere in a flurry of sexy drama. You have it, you flaunt it and everyone around you wants it. And if they don't, you don't want to know them. You are particularly partial to group sex, especially if you are the centre of attention. Just make sure it is safe sex. Song: ABBA *Money, Money, Money*

GEMINI

You are adventuresome, witty and charming. But as an air sign, when the wind changes you can be melodramatic, neurotic and inconsistent. But this can make you very exciting. You tend to be a mover and groover, often attracting those with who cannot think for themselves and are attracted to your flighty ways. You tend to have many relationships and are very adaptable to alternative and new lifestyles. The more, the merrier. You tend to have many sexual liaisons at once, each as important and necessary as the other. You love the drama. You tend to get bored quickly and can be seen as superficial. You are not only the light, but also the moth attracted to it. Song Marcia Hine:s *I just don't know what to do with myself*

LIBRA

You are a sensual, seductive and sophisticated woman who loves hot passionate sex. You are lesbian or bisexual who is always on the lookout for a better woman, even if your lover is perfect. You just want more. You are a graceful, elegant mover and have a natural beauty that drives people wild. But of course you are very aware of that. You can be totally in love than wake up the next morning and decide that it is time to move on. But because your lovers adore you, they will have you back anytime. Lucky you. Just like a menstrual pad, your something every girl needs. Song: Suzi Quatro *Down Devil Gate Drive*

VIRGO

You are a very selective and demanding woman, and if you don't find Mr Right, you are happy to live without him. You are strictly heterosexual, traditional and monogamous. If you happen to be gay then your parents have lied to you about when you were born. When you do have sex, you make sure it is clean, tidy and organised, with no messy bits. But you would most likely prefer a good cup of tea and a bit of telly. Not that your boring, you're just above animalistic romps in the bedroom. It's just a bit savage really. Song: Helen Reddy *I am woman (hear me roar)*

CAPRICORN

You are highly sexed, passionate and have a huge appetite for life. You can be quite moralistic, so even though you like lots of sex, it's not too adventurous. No menage a trois for you. You are very possessive and once you find your mate, they are yours for life. You tend to like playing by the rules and be very cautious, so if you happen to be a lesbian, you are in the closet. You can be very moody and depressive when things go wrong, and you don't let yourself get to happy.

Song: Cher *Gypsies, Tramps, Thieves*

AQUARIUS

You are sexually broad-minded and you enjoy experimenting with sex. You are a new age chic and you like things that are alternative. You tend to be androgynous, naturally balancing you feminine and masculine sides. You are a bit of an emotional loner and you hate intimacy, so you never really get close to someone. But that suits you fine. This also means that you don't possessive and in fact get your kicks from watching your partner having it off with someone else. Your into group sex where you don't have to know the persons name, just how good they are at sex. For you, life's just one big experiment that needs to be tested.Song: Diana Ross *Chain*

SCORPIO

You are a complex, intense and adventurous woman with a lusty passion for life. You use sex as a power tool and keep people submissive using this power. You love control and are attracted to people in positions of power, which are still mainly men in our society. You are great at sex and can keep your lover in mesmerised desire. You also have periods of celibacy, which is part of your control regime. But that's your life. You always go in for extremes. You are very much an all or nothing type of gal, and as you are stubborn, your extremes maybe something to spite others. You tend to be self-destructive and dramatic, another indication of your zest for life. Life is never quiet with you.Song: Kim Mazelle *Young Hearts Run Free*

SAGITTARIUS

You are a high-spirited, eager and joyous woman who is always on the move. You're the original girls scout, with lots of earthy humour and slapdash enthusiasm. You are very physical and you like to get your hands onto everything. You love orgies, have open relationships and enjoy a good romp in the hay anytime of the day. And if it wasn't good for you, you damn well will let them know. You tend to be bisexual and enjoy experimenting with everyone and everything. Life is never dull when you're around. Song: Tina Turner *Nutbush City Limit*

PISCES

You are a mysterious, beautiful and romantic woman that truly believes your princess or prince will come one day. You are in love with love and tend to roam from relationship to relationship looking for that magic. You find it hard to be single and have many varied relationships. Life is often to hard for the dreamy, you so you try to find someone to do it all for you. You tend not to be too interested in sex and quite often have deeply emotional non-sexual relationships with people. You are very compassionate for the unfortunate in society, but have poor personal relationship skills. Song: Olivia Newton-John *Hopelessly Devoted to You*

toxic goddesses

"Shayla! Hi, it's good to see you! It's been so long!"
"Mary, Hi. Yeah, it has. What, six years...about?"
"At least, sit down. What are you drinking? Vodka?"
"No, had to give it away, I'm getting too old. Umm, just Soda water, thanks."
"You are joking...You? Soda water? Come on - we're the same age or thereabouts. Let me get you something else. Glass of wine? Riesling?"
"Glass of wine? Yeah thanks a lot, bitch - what is it they serve here?Coolabah? No, Soda only for now, thanks."
"Alright, but I'm warning you - you won't get the better of me just by staying sober!"
"What's that supposed to mean?"
"You know, old time's sake. I heard you broke up with Zelda, what, five months ago?"
"Yeah. She's gone back to England now. Jane went with her. Heard they were buying a flat together. Hey ho. I'm over it now - more or less. What about you? I take it from your 'old time's sake' line you're single too?"
"Yep. Marta didn't work out. She's seeing our old boss now, would you believe?"
"Vinegar Tits? Really? How must that make you feel?"
"Old Vinegar's alright. Marta's happy, I suppose. Still - I'm really pleased to see you Shayla - now at least neither of us have ties. And there is that unfinished business."
"Yes, well...Look Mary, I don't drink much any more so I'm not feeling that comfortable in this pub which has witnessed far too much of my history. Can we go somewhere else, somewhere quieter, and I need to eat something."
"Why not come back to my place - plenty of food, it's quiet, I'll get the fire going - oh and I promise I'll behave - at least until midnight."
"I'll be asleep by then; sounds perfect."
****
"That was a delicious meal, Mary, thanks. Oh, do you know how long it's been since anyone tickled my feet? You've never forgotten, have you. I haven't felt this relaxed for long."
"Ssh. No I haven't forgotten. You're still my goddess, Shayla."
"Not much of a goddess now, I'm afraid."
"Of course you are. You're beautiful. Let me look at you; your eyes are so sad - what's wrong Shayla?"
"I don't feel beautiful, my tits have sagged..."
"So have mine; I quite like saggy tits."
"My arse has spread..."
"It's round and smooth and very sexy, feel it - so soft, ripe..."
"I've got a fat belly..."
"They're called curves - it's voluptuous. It's womanly. Shayla, you are beautiful. You know I've never forgotten you. You've aged a tiny bit, as we all have. I've put on at least seven kilos since you saw me last. Do you think I look too fat,sloppy, ugly?"
"No, of course I don't,"
"Then stop thinking all these ugly thoughts about yourself and let me kiss you."
"I don't want you to."
"Why not?"
"Because... I've got Hep C."
"Right...and?"
"That's it. I've got Hepatitis C. That's why Zelda left. We got tested finally for HIV and Hep C and I've got Hep C. Zelda couldn't cope. She wants to have a kid,and as I probably got it ten years ago when were all fresh young things running around at The Playground, into anything, everything...well I may only have five,ten years left."
"I see. So you've hidden yourself away all this time since you've known. Feeling dirty, ugly..."
"Toxic, actually. I was on Interferon. It made me feel ghastly for little result. Nowall I can think about is my poor liver, every bit as toxic as bloody Homebush Bay..."
"Toxic. Right. Come on, I'll run us a bath. Let me wash you and we'll pretend that your insides are just as clean as your outside. Then I'll take you to bed and we'll get sweaty and sticky and have fun. You are beautiful, Shayla. You'll always be a goddess. Did you know that just about all the girls we ran with back then also have Hep C? We didn't know much then, did we? We were young and gorgeous and pretty silly. Now we're all older, some of us are not very well - but we're still gorgeous. It's hard to have our mortality catch up with us, but it does, sooner or later; so you'd better enjoy yourself while you can. Now, about that kiss..."

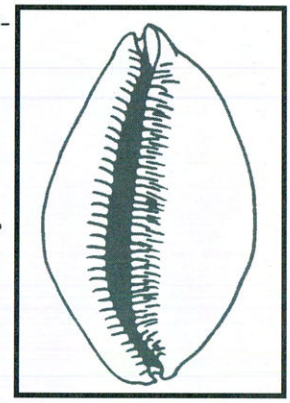
- Kass Dee

Short Story:

Annabelle wrapped her legs around the man that was fucking her so she could feel something, anything to numb her nothingness. It was like this all the time. She actually couldn't care less that he was or where he was from , but it made her feel good to be physical, to be screwed like an animal because then she didn't have to think. She enjoyed sex, that was not the problem, and she didn't use sex to replace or find some lost love. It just made her feel real. Stopped the rising black that wanted to grip her head in eternal darkness. She could do this with women as well, but usually she ended up liking them. Women seemed so vulnerable. She liked the feeling of being fucked, of fucking someone and pushing it until she was satisfied. She preferred people she knew as it made it easier and the danger wasn't there. It was still a risk because nobody should find out. Annabelle usually found discrete people, people that understood that a night of sex was just that and nothing else.

Annabelle liked her body. It was large and curvy, soft and sensual, unsaitable though. She often smiled suddenly at work, remembering sexual nights of experimental bliss when both men and women scrambled to taste her body in a flood of ecstasy. At these times, her colleagues would stare and whisper at her sudden heat, her redness, and if close enough, her wetness.

It often caused a problem in her relationships. Friends did not understand, lovers were insecure. But Annabelle revelled in her body, worshipped the ritual of physical moaning and mounting pleasures. Many women disappeared after lunch to purge their food or swallow laxatives. Annabelle drove away to feel the pleasures of her body as only she knew how, returning sublime and reconnected, at least for a few hours.



Once a lover of hers swore a past of abuse, of forgotten memories that caused only physical desires as a form of love. Annabelle thought long and hard and although convinced for a while, when realism returned, she knew it was not the case. All physical things pleasured her. Tremendous gardens, succulent wine, rare fruits, beckoning flesh. If only she could let herself be.....

Jane rearranged her tailored suit and splashed her flushed face. She had better rush back to the typing pool as Alfred had already commented on her lateness and the last thing she wanted was extra attention. It still embarrassed her so. She was sure if her mum had called her Annabelle, her life would be so very different and real. Oh well, back to it.

(She was sure if she was Annabelle she would not always have to wear black, just so the wet did not show).

Gabrielle, Donna, Pauline plus Cody

by Karen Lopez

You're a pretty girl. Dressed for a night out with your lovers, won't they just love you. The mirror says that you look ultra-luxurious in silk velvet. A dream girl, wearing a cowl-neck top in silver with matching skirt that has stepped right out from the pages of Cosmopolitan. Recreated Cindy Crawford's look with make up from Maybelline, you want to look just like her. Budgeproof Great Wear Oil-Free Makeup, with Warm Beige adorn your face. All your little imperfections are hidden, can't see your freckles anymore. Natural Accents Blush colours your pallid checks. For your eyes you use Trio Eye Shadow in impeccable Greys, Smoked Kohl Eyeliner, Smoked Black. You can hardly see the dark shadows that are under your eyes, acting as a constant reminder to you of your late nights, your partying lifestyle. Lips we can not forget those luscious lips and they too are painted in style with Long Wearing Lipstick in Sand Coral. You have created a master piece to last till morning.

You're an ordinary girl. Nothing extraordinary about the way you look. Even your obsession with trying to be beautiful is common. No matter what you do with yourself you're never satisfied. There is always something wrong, something that needs improvement. You read all your Cleo and Cosmopolitan tips of the day and find new ways on improving yourself. Find all the colours that suit your complexion, hair cuts that best emphasis the shape of your face, clothes that make you look more like Claudia Schiffer. You always need to look your best. It can become very tiring to be always on the look out for the latest fashions but the girl next to you looks better than you and you continue. You want to be dramatic, so you go to your makeup case. The effect is intense, using bold pencils and creams you emphasis your eyes. Fingers smudging grey eyeshadows over the upper and lower lids, and finish of with coats of mascara. Lips smeared with a dark, sheer red lipstick. Not yet satisfied you walk to your closet in your bra and panties, pick out your long grey scooped-necked stretch dress and slip on your sandals. You have created a master piece to last till morning. Still not satisfied.

You're overweight. You must lose those last few kilos, can't be happy until you do, then you shall reward yourself and go to Mc Donald's. You're self-conscious, worried about people seeing your flab as you sit down. Blinded to your own beauty because others tell you are fat. In doing so you are letting your insecurities consume you. Finding disguises to hide behind maybe then they won't notice your massive thighs. You lie on the carpet in front of the TV with knees bent. You tip your pelvis up off the floor while keeping your lower back firmly on the carpet, squeezing your bottom and thighs. Already you feel that this is going to work, those kilos are dropping off. Then you pull your abs to raise your

upper body from the carpet simultaneously reaching for your knees. Wait thirty seconds, rest, watch TV and continue. You read an article on how to walk probably in a magazine and find out that you never did it probably. Walk with your arms bend at a 90 degree angle. Keeping arms close to your body, pumping them. Don't swing, pump, pump while your walking. You have created a master piece until you lose your motivation and forget all about your diet.

You're different. You're given names like weird and bizarre. They don't understand you. That doesn't worry you. You like to think that you don't concern yourself with social conceptions, restrictions, ideals. All you care about is your art. To you the female body is an artwork, a transformation of living colours that create an original. Try to capture its essence in a canvas or sculpture but always feeling that the original always surpasses anything that you can create. Try again later. You're in love with women but its never sexual. Enjoy observing them from a distance. Watching the way they more and talk and trying to create an image, a body image in your mind to transform to clay and create a record of perfection. Your face is a mixture of perfection and chaos. Colours mix and clash constantly, ever changing like your personality.

Individually your features can be seen by the observer as classically perfect but together they form a mess of contradictions. But you don't care you like it like that. You like the attention you receive when you enter a room. You have created a master piece to last you till morning and maybe the next day also.

●●●

ZOE'S BIG DAY OUT

by Kass Dee

Instructions: Hold book in one hand when reading:

Coogee Beach in February and not a single woman in sight. Zoe rolled and looked at Robert sunbaking next to her. He was turning a dark shade of red and was busy perving on the boy a few towels away. Unfortunately for Zoe he had spied him before applying sun block to her ample back. She was burnt in odd patches within the hour. Her dark, floppy sun hat drew the heat and prickled her head. She felt the beginnings of a headache and the sunblock felt thick and sticky.

"I'm going to the ladies," she announced. Desperate to get out of the sun for a while she waded through the hot sand. Conscious of her white legs, ample chafed thighs and body encased in its unforgiving and restrictive black swimsuit she mused that summer was the unkindest of months. "Perhaps I should go to the gym," she thought revulsion at the thought of her body undergoing such torture and of trying to keep up with all those toned, bronzed body's beautiful. The coolness hit her as she entered the toilet block. She blinked in the darkness: the brightness of outside made it impossible to see anything. She walked to the basin and turned on a single tap. She put both hands under the clear water to catch its cool, which she splashed several times to her face. Her eyes slowly adjusted to the dark. She began to feel quite chilled, the sweat on her body finally doing something. She made her way to one of the toilet cubicles and pulling down her swimmers sat down. Her head throbbed from the extreme change of temperatures. She looked about her for toilet paper. Finding none she got up, pulled up her swimmers and flushed the toilet. The water from the cistern above crashed loudly inside her head. She walked slowly out of the cubicle, a little unsteadily. She hesitated at the door of the shower before entering to see what state it was in. it was even darker in there, the slats of the single small window high up on the opposite letting in little light. The door
closed behind her.

"Well Hello," a voice said softly. Zoe swung round startled.

"Oh I'm sorry; I didn't realise there was anyone in here," said Zoe trying to back out but finding the door shut with the engaged bolt drawn.

"That's alright. I'm pretty quiet. I've nearly finished here." Zoe could make out the figure of a tall woman towelling her hair. The woman moved in front of the closed door blocking her exit. Zoe moved back a step. A single cold drop from the shower slid down her back. She shivered. The woman was looking at her. She had stopped towelling her hair. Zoe registered that she was wearing a pair of loose shorts; the towel draped around her bare shoulders. She held out her hand to Zoe. Zoe shook stupidly, a little confused.

"I'm afraid I startled you," said the woman. "I bet your mother never let you into a toilet block by yourself before."

"Well no...no she didn't," replied Zoe. Her body was very chilled by now, her legs rooted to the spot. The woman took half a step towards her.

"Sensible woman, your mother," she murmured. She put her hand on Zoe's shoulder and looked into her eyes. Her mouth opened a little as she inclined her head towards Zoe's. She put her other arm around her drawing her close, kissing her softly, smoothly and so quietly that Zoe was mesmerised. The woman kissed her again this time opening Zoe's mouth a little with her tongue. Zoe found herself being gently pushed onto the small wooden seat next to the shower. The woman pulled down the straps of Zoe one - piece. The skin of her breasts gleamed softly in the half-light. The woman lightly traced a finger over them and bent to kiss and lick them. She knelt between Zoe's legs, pulling the top of her swimmers down further, freeing Zoe's breasts completely. Her nipple had hardened. The woman licked one gently. The towel slid from her shoulders. Zoe saw her breasts; small with small hard, dark nipples. She closed her eyes, her body quite weak. The woman sucked her nipple, gently held it between her teeth; her hand found Zoe's nipple and squeezed it between her fingers. Zoe's breathing became rapid, shallow. The woman stood and pulled Zoe to her feet. She pulled the rest of her swimming costume down to Zoe's ankles. She ran her hands over Zoe's body.

"Gorgeous," she murmured softly as her hands traced circles over Zoe's belly and thighs. 'Your thighs are so soft, so beautiful," she sighed. Gently she spread Zoe's legs.

"Please," Zoe whispered as she sat down on the wooden seat again, her legs having given way. She left them parted hoping the woman wouldn't stop. The woman licked one of her own fingers and softly traced it along Zoe's cunt. It gathered a little of Zoe's moisture.

"Good girl," she said quietly. She bent down

between Zoe's legs and licked her where she had touched. Her tongue sort out Zoe's clitoris and tickled it making it harder. She pushed her hands down on Zoe's thighs pushing her face into the moist depths of the girl seeking with her tongue the secrets she held. Again she found her clit, licking and sucking. With one hand she kneaded Zoe's flesh pulling up her dark mound.; making her clit stand up. With the fingers of her other hand she parted her lips and placed a finger inside. Curling one finger she pushed it in and out, still sucking and licking Zoe's cunt and clit. She added another finger pushing her face in closer and closer, wrapping her tongue around and around her cunt, slipping in and out, in and out. Zoe gripped the slats of the seat gasping. Zoe's hand sort one of her own nipples and she squeezed, pleasuring herself in a simple way as her cunt and clit were worked over by this stranger.

"Oh God, oh God," she cried silently as the sensations she was feeling overtook her whole self, wave upon wave. The woman slowed her movements still pressuring with her tongue and fingers as Zoe's cunt opened and closed and her body wracked with the spasms of orgasm. The woman put her head on Zoe's lap for a while. Zoe stroked it and looked up at the ceiling, trying to catch her breath. Slowly, the woman stood up. She wiped her face and her hand on her towel, put on a t-shirt that had been on the floor. She looked at Zoe's flushed face.

"Thank-you," she said softly and out of the shower cubicle, leaving the towel and disappeared. Zoe breathed a long breath. She sat up straight, arched her back and tried to stand. She wiped her soaked cunt on the towel and slowly pulled up her swimmers. She noticed the towel was monogrammed 'Ruby'. She splashed her face with cold water again and staggers outside blinking in the bright sunlight. She went over to Robert and sat back down on the towel.

"Where have you been?" asked Robert still checking out the boy a few towels away.

"I...I just met this woman in the toilets," she said," Ruby. We fucked..."

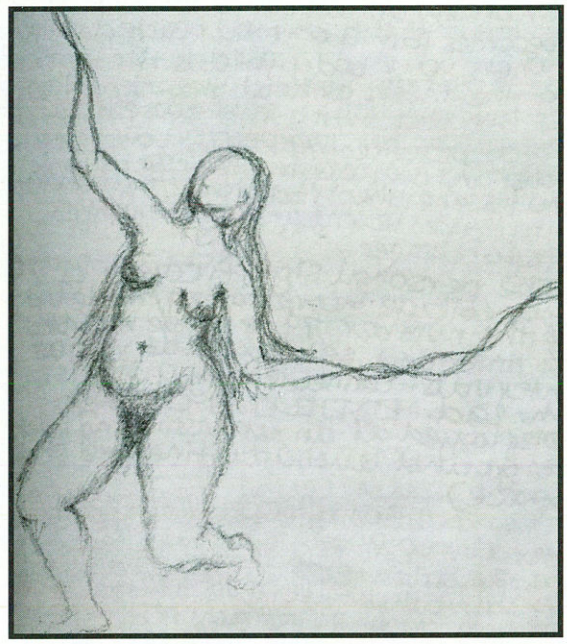
"What?" shrieked Robert, his jaw dropping and looking at her properly for the first time that day. "Oh you girl! You've had too much sun."

Lunchtime

I look around, slowly, making no eye contact; they are, they are looking at me, disgusted with my fat arse, my wobbly legs, my booming breasts, my hanging chins, my billowing arms, my bulging feet, my fatness, my hugeness, my overflowing stinking mass.

That's why I have to stay here, close and safe and ok because no one can touch me, ever.
Here I can purge my sins and be pure.
Always.
Here I do not have to be mother, child, wife, lover, worker, boss, student, teacher, citizen, you.

I can eat or not eat. I can release or be comforted.
I can control. I can be me.



BRIDAL CHAMBER

"Here the children have a custom. After the celebration of evil they take those vacant heads that shone once with such anguish and glee and throw them over the bridge, watching the smash, orange, as they hit below...
- Margaret Atwood, "Eating Fire"

I.

Here the grooms have a custom. After the celebration of ownership the new husband parades a piece of furniture as large as a woman around the top of a staircase. Crowds of relatives and well-wishers assemble beneath, gripping the stems of white flowers. They sigh these phrases: "What craftsmanship" / "It's fucking great" / "It'll look fantastic in the bedroom/ kitchen/ attic" / "And it goes with his curtains". If it's a chair he will sit on it. If it's a bed, he will lie on it. If it's a carpet, no matter how exotic the threads of its weaving, he will grind mud from his boots into the pile. The whole time he will be smiling like a cut pumpkin.

II.

Now Gawain sees himself at the top of the staircase next to a piece of furniture. He sees the crowds, relatives and well-wishers, gripping the stems of white flowers. The phrases "What craftsmanship" / "It's fucking great" / " It'll look fantastic in the bedroom/ kitchen/ attic" / "And it goes with his curtains" ring in his ears like a guillotine. It's the Middle Ages, and Gawain is standing next to a kidney-shaped coffee-table. It is orange. It has brass feet. It clashes with the tapestries, and reflected in its laminex even sunset looks ridiculous.

III.

The crowds grip the stems of drooping white flowers. Gawain is attempting to smile like a cut pumpkin, but yellow seeds tumble out of his mouth into everybody's hair. Well-wishers and relatives repeat these phrases: "What craftsmanship" / "It's fucking great" / "It'll look fantastic in the bedroom/ kitchen/ attic" / "And it goes with his curtains". In the mirror of a brass foot Gawain watches his face dribble like aspic and it reminds him of a crone he once saw stuffing the coins of his youth into her dusty cleavage as she sold him a kidney-shaped coffee-table.

—Vanessa Badham

the dawning of night's heaven

moon, she rises
softly folded veil reveals
light,the mountain top

trees stand like the wayward stubbled growth of my head against the coming of her illuminated grace

what a strange vast ocean, the jewelled sky

clouds sit like crumbs,
an angels wing rendered in the cotton wool of kindergarten
a broken checkerboard
the memory of a pattern in the desert sand

glorious world
she is in the waters, she is in the sky!

live river,she pulses
the mingled juices of delight
i l i s t e n
s h e s p e a k s m y s i l e n c e
the universe is an artist
perfection performed
she is bringing a new dawn
the dawning of night's heaven

- SASS

Dislocated

I'm dislocated
I don't feel the right of way
As I travel down the lonley road towards tomorrow
If the time is right
I think I might stay

I'm dislocated
I don't know where I went wrong
Standing on the outside now looking in
I don't belong
I don't belong

I'm dislocated
Wandering round wondering where I'll go
And if some time our paths should cross
before tomorrow
No stones I'll throw
No stones I'll throw

by Annie Connellan

Sun is Shining

Sun is shining
Love is hiding
Mouth is trying
Senses frying

Sun is burning
Love is yearning
Guards are falling
Mystery calling

But is not black and white
like the photo you'd
Like it to be
Can't you see
It's pale and it's grey
And the lines undefined

Sun is fading
Love is craving
Pleasure piping
Needs satisfying

But it's not black and white
Like the photo you'd
Like it to be
Can't you see
It's pale and it's grey
And the lines undefined

Sun is rising
Eyes are smiling
Dawn frustration
Brings complication

by Annie Connellan

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UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY WOMENS COLLECTIVE